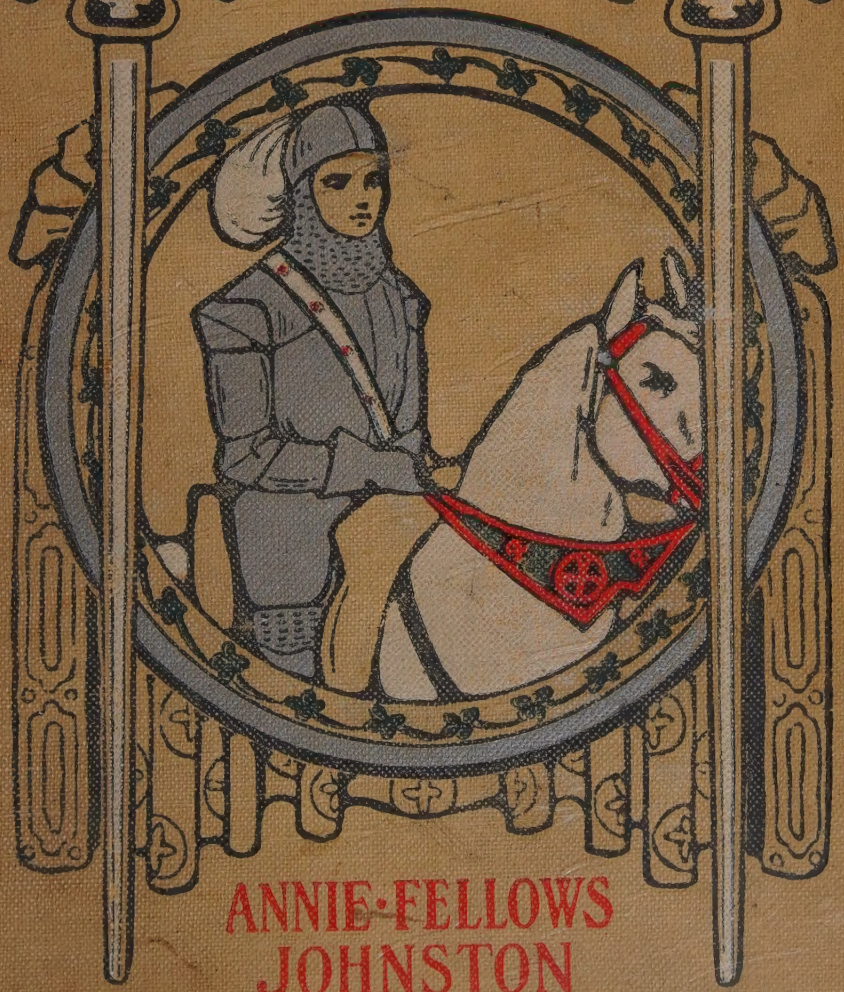
The Little Colonel's Knight Comes Riding



Annie Fellows Johnston

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"WITH THE DONNING OF THE ANCIENT DRESS SHE SEEMED TO HAVE PUT ON THE SWEET SHY MANNER THAT HAD BEEN THE CHARM OF ITS FIRST WEARER."

(*See page 142*)

THE LITTLE COLONEL'S KNIGHT COMES RIDING

BY
ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

AUTHOR OF
"THE LITTLE COLONEL SERIES," "BIG BROTHER,"
"OLE MAMMY'S TORMENT," "JOEL: A BOY
OF GALILEE," "ASA HOLMES," ETC.

Illustrated by
ETHELDRED B. BARRY

And sometimes in the mirror blue,
The knights come riding, two by two."
THE LADY OF SHALOTT.

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THE LITTLE COLONEL'S KNIGHT COMES RIDING

CHAPTER I

THE HANGING OF THE MIRROR

It was a June morning in Kentucky. The doctor's nephew coming at a gallop down the pike into Lloydsboro Valley, reined his horse to a walk as he reached the railroad crossing, and leaning forward in his saddle, hesitated a moment between the two roads.

The one along the railroad embankment was sweet with a tangle of wild honeysuckle, and led straight to the little post-office where his morning mail awaited him. The other would take him a mile out of his way, but it was through a thick beech woods, and the cool leafage of its green aisles tempted him. A red-bird darting on ahead

suddenly decided his course, for following some quick impulse, as if the cardinal wings had beckoned him, he turned off the highway into the woods.

"I might as well go around and have a look at that Lindsey Cabin," he said to himself, as an excuse for turning aside. "If it's in as good shape as I think it is, maybe I can persuade the Van Allens to rent it for the summer. It's a pity to have a picturesque place like that standing empty when it has such possibilities for hospitality, and the Van Allen girls a positive genius for giving jolly house-parties. To get that family out to Lloydsboro for the summer would be paving the way to no end of good times."

The farther he rode into the cool woods the better the idea pleased him, and where the bridle-path crossed a narrow creek he paused a moment before plunging down the bank. Somewhere up the ravine a spring was trickling out in a ceaseless flow. He could not see it, but he could hear the gurgle of the water, as cold and crystal clear it splashed down into its rocky basin.

"They could picnic here to their hearts' content," he said aloud, glancing up and down the ravine at the rank growth of fern and maidenhair which festooned the rocks.

Alex Shelby had spent only part of two summers in Lloydsboro Valley, but the woodsy smell of mint and pennyroyal, mingling with the fern, brought back the recollection of at least a dozen picnics he had enjoyed near this spot, most of them moonlight affairs, and all of them so pleasant that he was determined to bring about their repetition if possible. Of course this summer he would not have as much time for outings as he had had then. Now that he had finished his medical course he intended to shoulder as much as possible of his uncle's work. The old doctor's practice had grown far too heavy for him. But at the same time there need be no limit to the pleasant things that the summer could bring forth, especially if the Van Allen family could be installed in the Lindsey Cabin.

A quarter of a mile more brought him almost to the edge of the woods and to the beginning of the Lindsey place. The spacious, two-story log cabin standing back among the great forest trees, might have been a relic of Daniel Boone's day, so carefully had his pioneer pattern been copied by skilful architects. But the resemblance was only outward. Inside it was luxuriously equipped with every modern convenience. For a year it had stood tenantless, and Alex Shelby never passed it without re-

gretting that such a charming old place should be abandoned to dust and spiders. The last time he had gone by it, he had noticed that it was beginning to show the effect of its long neglect. Some of the windows were completely overgrown by ragged rose-vines and Virginia Creeper, and a tin water-spout that had blown loose from its fastenings, dangled from the eaves.

Now as he came near he saw in surprise that the place seemed to have an alert, live air, as if just awakened from sleep. The windows were all thrown open, the vines were trimmed, and were a mass of bloom, the dead leaves were raked neatly in piles and the cobwebs no longer hung from the cornices in dusty festoons.

A long ladder leaning against the front of the house, rested on the sill of an upper window, and Alex wondered if the agents had painters at work. He hoped so. The more thorough the renovation, the more attractive it would be to the Van Allens.

Suddenly his pleased expression changed to one of surprise and dismay, as he saw that the place was already inhabited. Empty packing-boxes, excelsior and wrapping paper littered the front porch. A new hammock hung between the posts. Somebody's garden-hat lay on the steps. Moreover, a

slender girl in a white dress stood at the foot of the ladder, evidently about to ascend, for she shook it to test its balance, and then cautiously stepped up on the first round.

Her back was toward Alex, and he fervently hoped that she would turn around so that he might see her face, then more fervently hoped that she wouldn't, since it would be somewhat embarrassing to be caught staring as inquisitively as he was doing. Unconsciously at sight of her he had brought his horse to a standstill, and now sat wondering who she could be and what she was about to do. It was as if a curtain had gone up on the first scene of an intensely interesting play, and for the moment he forgot everything else in admiration of the stage setting, and the graceful little figure poised on the ladder.

"Probably going up for an armful of roses," he thought.

"Hold tight, Ca'line Allison! Don't let it slip!" she called in a high sweet voice, almost as if she were singing the words, and Alex noticed for the first time, a small coloured girl behind the ladder, bracing herself against it to hold it steady.

The ascent was a slow one. Twice she tripped on her skirts, and with a little shriek almost slipped

through between the rounds. Only one hand was free for climbing. The other grasped some dark object that seemed to be a picture frame, though why one should be carrying a picture frame up the outside of a house was more than the young man could imagine, and he concluded he must be mistaken.

The last step brought her head on a level with the second story window, and up where the sun struck through the trees in a broad shaft of light. Her hair had been beautiful in the shadow; a rare tint of auburn with bronze gold glints, but now in the sunshine it was an aureole. What was it it reminded him of? A fragment of a half-forgotten poem came to his mind, although he was not given to remembering such things:

> **"Sandalphon the angel of glory,**
> **Sandalphon the angel of prayer."**

Then he almost laughed aloud at the comparison, for a dazzling flash of light, blinding him for an instant, was reflected into his eyes from the object she carried, and he saw that it was a looking-glass that she was taking up the ladder with such care.

"What a very human and very feminine angel

"THE OTHER GRASPED SOME DARK OBJECT THAT SEEMED TO BE A PICTURE FRAME."

of glory it is," he thought. But the next instant, still with the amused smile on his face, he was spurring his horse down the road as fast as it could gallop. The girl on the ladder had caught sight of his reflection in the mirror as she reached up to lay it on the window sill, and had turned a startled face towards him. Not for worlds would he have had her know that he had been so discourteous as to sit staring at her. He had forgotten himself in the interest of the moment.

Eager to find out who the new tenants were at the Lindsey Cabin, he rode rapidly on, turning from the woodland road into a maple-lined avenue leading back to the post-office. Just as he made the turn another surprise confronted him. He almost collided with two girls who were hurrying along arm in arm, under a red parasol.

Both Lloyd Sherman and Kitty Walton were old friends of his, but he had to look twice to assure himself that he saw aright. They had been away at school all year, and he had not heard of their return.

"I thought you were still at Warwick Hall!" he exclaimed, dismounting and stepping forward with bared head, to shake hands in his most cordial way. "When did you get home?"

"Only this mawning," answered Lloyd. "All the Commencement exercises were ovah last Thursday, and we're school girls no longah. *'Beyond the Alps lies Italy!'* Kitty can tell you all about it, for she had the Valedictory."

Kitty met Alex's amused smile with a flash of her black eyes, but before she could deny having used the trite subject that had been so popular in the old Lloydsboro seminary as to have become a standing joke, Alex answered, "Well, you've certainly lost no time in starting out to explore the wide world that lies before you. I've always heard that there's nothing to equal the zeal of a sweet girl graduate about to scale her Alps. You've barely reached home, haven't been off the cars three hours, I'll bet, and yet here you are on the war-path again. What Italy are you climbing after now?"

Ordinarily his banter would have been promptly resented by both girls, but now it served only to recall the amazing news that had sent them hurrying away from the post-office on an excited quest. With a dramatic gesture, Kitty drew a letter from her belt and held it out to him.

"Think of it!" she exclaimed, her cheeks pink with excitement. "Gay Melville's here in the Val-

ley! Right here in Lloydsboro! Settled in the Lindsey Cabin for the summer, and we didn't know anything about it till ten minutes ago."

"Gay Melville," repeated Alex, instantly alert at mention of the cabin.

"Oh he doesn't know her, Kitty," interposed Lloyd. "He wasn't out in the Valley the wintah she spent her Christmas vacation with you."

"Then you've something to live for!" declared Kitty with emphasis. "She's one of the old Warwick Hall girls. Was in last year's class with Allison and Betty, and she's just the sweetest, dearest —"

"Don't tell him any moah," interrupted Lloyd. "Let him find out for himself."

"What's she doing at the Lindsey Cabin?" he asked. He kept a straight face, although inwardly chuckling over the fact that he knew well enough what she was doing, at least what she had been doing three minutes ago.

"They've taken it for the summer, that is, her sister Lucy and husband have, Mr. and Mrs. Jameson Harcourt. They're from San Antonio, and you know the Lindseys spend their winters there. It seems they interested Mr. Harcourt in the Cabin, and of course Gay was wild to get back

to the Valley, and she persuaded them to come. She wrote to me just as soon as it was decided, but the letter never reached me till this morning. She thought I would get it before I started home; but it's just like Gay to mix up her address with mine. She was so excited when she wrote that she addressed it to Warwick Hall Station, *Texas,* instead of District of Columbia. It has been travelling all over the country, and it's a wonder that it ever reached me at all."

"And the worst of it is," added Lloyd, "of co'se she expected we'd all be heah to meet her. But we stayed ovah in Washington two days, and when they came in last night there wasn't a soul at the station to welcome them. The ticket agent told me about it just now as we came past. She seemed surprised, he said, and disappointed. She must have thought it queah that none of us were there."

"Won't she be funny when she's found what a mistake she's made!" exclaimed Kitty. "She's always making mistakes, and is always perfectly ridiculous over them when she finds it out. We're going to take you to call on her, Alex, just as soon as they're settled. She plays the violin divinely."

"I'll go right back with you now," he offered promptly.

"No you won't," they cried in the same breath, and Kitty explained, "No telling what sort of a mess they'll be in with their unpacking. But if they're ready to see company by night, I'll telephone to you, and we'll all go over."

"I shall live only for that moment," he declared, laughing, then added as he turned to mount his horse, "I'm mighty glad I met you, and I'm more than glad that you've both come home to stay."

A flourish of the red parasol answered the courtly sweep of his hat as they parted. He rode on rapidly towards the post-office, wondering if they would find the girlish, white-clad figure still perched on the ladder, up among the roses, with the sun making an aureole of her shining hair. He had never seen such hair. "Sandalphon, the angel of glory" — but the quotation broke off with a laugh. Her name was *Gay,* and it was a *looking glass* that she was carrying up the ladder. "Well, she's an original little thing," he mused, "and if she lives up to her name the Lindsey Cabin will be just as lively a social centre as if the Van Allen girls had possession."

The encounter with Alex had delayed the girls but a moment or two, still they walked on faster than ever to make up the lost time.

"What do you suppose we'll find her doing?" queried Lloyd.

"Something unexpected, I'll be bound," was the answer. "Will you ever forget that first time we saw her, when she came out to play the violin at the Freshman reception? Such a pretty white dress, and that rapt, uplifted look on her face that makes you think of St. Cecilias and seraphim, and with one foot in a white kid shoe, and the other in that awful old red felt bedroom slipper, edged in black fur!"

"Or the time she lost her belt in Washington," suggested Lloyd. "Probably we'll find her unpacking if the trunks came. But Gay's trunks nevah were known to arrive on time. We may have to be lending her shirtwaists and collahs for a month."

By this time they had reached the rustic footbridge leading over a ravine to the Cabin, and were in full view of the front windows. Gay was still on the ladder. She had made several trips up and down it since Alex passed. It was hard to decide at what angle to hang the mirror on the window casing, as she had seen them in old Dutch houses in Holland; and in marking the place with the point of the only nail that she had provided on which to hang the mirror, she dropped the nail.

Several minutes had been wasted in a fruitless search for it. Others were to be had for the pulling, if one could extract them from the empty packing-boxes, but no hammer could be found on the premises, and it was only after much twisting and struggling that the little coloured girl finally managed to pull one with her teeth.

Another five minutes had been wasted in searching for something with which to drive the nail. Then Gay gingerly ascended the ladder again, armed with a pair of heavy old tongs, taken from the porch fireplace. She had just reached the top of the ladder when the girls caught sight of her.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Kitty in a low tone. "It'll never do in the world to appear at *this* juncture. She's pretty sure to drop through the ladder anyhow, or upset herself, or have some exhibition of the usual Melville luck, even if she's left to herself. And if she should suddenly discover us there's no telling what dreadful thing might happen."

"Let's slip up behind the arbour and watch till she's safely down to earth," whispered Lloyd. "What *do* you suppose she's trying to do, and where do you suppose she managed to pick up Ca'line Allison?"

"Sh!" was the answer. "That's the Dutch

mirror she got in Amsterdam last summer. She wrote that it was the triumph of her life when she got home with it whole. She carried it all the way, instead of packing it in her trunk. Listen! What's that she's saying?"

The words floated down to them distinctly. "Ca'line Allison, you'll have to get me something besides these tongs to drive this nail with. I might as well try to do it with a pair of stilts. Besides it's making dents in them, and it's wicked to spoil such beautiful old brasses. Mercy! Don't get up *yet!*" she shrieked wildly, as the shifting of Ca'line Allison's small body made the ladder slip a trifle.

"Wait till I poke these tongs through the window and take hold with both hands. Now! Hunt around and find me a stone or a piece of brick."

The girls behind the arbour could not see her face, but the sight of the familiar little figure clinging to the ladder, and the sound of the beloved voice made them long to rush out and squeeze her.

"Isn't her hair a glory, up there in the sunshine?" whispered Kitty. "The idea of anybody calling it plain red — such a fluff of bronzy auburn with all those little crinkles of gold! And listen to that whistle! You'd think it was a real mocking bird."

Wholly unconscious of her audience, Gay teetered on the ladder, whistling and trilling like a happy bobolink, until the little black girl climbed up after her with a brick which she had dug out from the well curb. The girls waited until the nail was securely in place, the mirror hung and Gay had begun to crawl down the ladder backward, before they rushed out from their hiding-place.

They pounced upon her just as she reached the bottom round, and then ensued what Kitty called a pow-wow — an enthusiastic welcome known only to old school chums who have been separated so long a time as a whole twelvemonth. Questions, answers, explanations, a bubbling over of delight at once more being together, kept them talking all at once for nearly ten minutes. Then Gay, remembering her duty as hostess led the way into the house.

"Come in and see Lucy and her fond spouse," she exclaimed. "They're still at breakfast although it's ten o'clock. None of us could make a fire in the range. It simply wouldn't burn. But we had brought a chafing dish in one of the boxes, and we found another in the pantry, and they've been mussing around for the last two hours with them, having the time of their lives. Lucy made

fudge and omelette and tea for her breakfast, being the things she knows best how to make, and brother Jameson is trying flap-jacks and coffee."

"What did you have?" asked Lloyd.

"I? Oh I emulated the example of 'The old person of Crewd' who said

> "'We use sawdust for food.
> It's cheap by the ton
> And it nourishes one,
> And that's the main object of food.'

I munched a handful of some sort of new breakfast straw, but it wasn't very satisfying, and I was just going in to get a cup of brother Jameson's coffee. I told him to put my name in the pot. Come on in and have some too."

Throwing open the dining-room door she began a series of breezy introductions that set them all to laughing and swept away every vestage of formality.

Both Lloyd and Kitty protested against taking a single mouthful at that hour, but the young host poured out a cup of very muddy coffee with such a beaming smile, and the little bride offered a very bitter cup of tea in competition, with a merry insistence so like Gay's, that they could not refuse.

"It's going to be lovely," Kitty managed to

whisper under cover of the bustle of bringing in more hot water. "They're almost as harum-scarum and hap-hazard as Gay herself, and 'brother Jameson' looks as if he might be the 'Gibson man's' youngest brother."

"These 'babes in the wood' would have perished but for me," began Gay, who was rattling along as if she were wound up. "*I* was the robin who came to the rescue. I went over to Stumptown bright and early — you see I remembered the short cut through the woods — and as luck would have it, found some one willing to come, at the very first house where I inquired. (But she can't come till nearly noon, hence this disorderly feasting and rioting.) Ca'line Allison was swinging on the gate, with her finger in her mouth. I didn't know her, but she remembered me, and complimented me by asking if I'd done brought my fiddle along. I think I'll engage her for the summer for my little maid-in-waiting. She's as quick as a monkey and would look so cunning diked up in a cap and apron. What's that rhyme Betty made about her when she was flower-girl at her own mother's wedding? Oh by the way, where *is* Betty? Why didn't she come with you?"

"For the good reason that we didn't know we

were coming heah ourselves when we left home," answered Lloyd. "Betty went on to Commencement with all the rest of the family, but it was hard for her to tear herself away from her beloved writing. We hadn't been back at Locust half an houah this mawning till she was at it again."

"Betty is Mrs. Sherman's god-daughter," explained Gay in an aside to her brother-in-law. "The one who I told you is such a genius. She's writing a book." Then turning to Lloyd. "It isn't that same old one she was at work on at school, is it?"

"No, it's something she began last fall. Mothah wanted her to make her début in Louisville when she was through school, just as I am going to do next wintah, but Betty begged to be allowed to stay in the country. She said she'd nevah be a brilliant success socially, but that she'd do her best to be a credit to the family in some other way."

"She will, too," prophesied Gay. "Some day we'll all be proud of the little song-bird you rescued from the Cuckoo's Nest. Dear old Betty! I'd like to hug her this very minute."

The grandfather's clock in the hall was striking eleven when they rose from the table, but Gay would not listen when the girls attempted to take

their leave. "You haven't seen my room," she insisted, "nor my mirror. Come on up stairs and look into my mirror. It's the joy of my heart, and maybe we'll all see our fate in it. I like to pretend that it's a sort of magic glass — that some wizard of the wood has laid a spell on it, so that at certain times all the figures that have ever been reflected in it must march across it again. Wouldn't it be lovely if all the good times it is going to reflect this summer could be made to pass over it again whenever I wanted to recall them?"

"We'd lead the procession," announced Kitty, "for we were the first objects that crossed the path after you got it hung. If we were not 'a group of damsels glad' we were at least a couple of them."

"But you were not the first," confessed Gay. "Just as I held it up to adjust it, I had such a thrillingly romantic experience that I nearly fell off the ladder. It showed me the reflection of an awfully good looking young man on horse-back. But when I turned to look over my shoulder at the original he was galloping down the road like a blue streak."

"I wondah who it could have been," mused Lloyd. "We met Alex Shelby on hawseback just a few minutes befoah we got heah, but he nevah

said a word about having seen anybody, and he seemed surprised when we told him that the cabin had been rented."

They were up in Gay's room now, and running to the window, Kitty seated herself in the low chair beside it. "Oh how fine!" she called. "It's at exactly the right angle, for I can see everything along the path without looking out. It'll be a sort of Hildegarde's mirror, won't it! Like the Lady of Shalott's."

Half under her breath she began to recite the lines they had learned so long ago, and from force of habit Lloyd joined the sing-song chant:

> "And moving through the mirror clear
> That hangs before her all the year,
> Shadows of the world appear."

Smiling to see how well they remembered it, they went on in unison down to the couplet:

> "And sometimes through the mirror blue
> The knights come riding two by two."

There Kitty broke off to say "I don't see how that can happen here *this* summer. It will be sheer luck if they come even in singles. There never were so few boys left in the Valley, and it's too bad to have it happen so the summer that you're here. Nearly everybody is going away. You can

count on the fingers of one hand the few who will stay."

"What about the two knights of Kentucky?" asked Gay. "You're a lucky girl, Kitty, to have two such splendid cousins as Keith and Malcolm MacIntyre."

"They are already gone. They sailed for England with Uncle Sydney and Aunt Elise last week. You know I wrote you they were going and that Allison was to be in the party too. And oh Gay! Didn't you get that letter? Then you haven't heard the most important thing of all! *Allison is engaged!* It didn't happen till a few days before they sailed, and it isn't announced yet, but of course she wanted you to know and I wrote to you right away."

Gay bounced out of her chair as if a bomb exploded in the room.

"Oh you don't mean it!" she cried tragically, clasping her hands. "Why she's only been out of school a year! The first of our class to go! Oh tell me all about it! Begin at the beginning and don't skip a thing!"

Throwing herself down on the floor at Kitty's feet, she propped her chin on her hands, and her elbows in Kitty's lap, prepared to listen.

"There isn't much to tell. You know the fortune that Mammy Easter predicted for her was nice, but it wasn't very exciting. She was to 'wed wid de quality and ride in her ca'iage.' Well, his family is certainly quality, the Claibornes of Virginia, and she'll live in Washington and have several kinds of carriages. Isn't it odd? We knew him when he was just a boy. He was on the same transport with us when we went to the Philippines, and we never imagined then that we'd ever see him again."

"But I thought that that young Lieutenant Logan," began Gay.

Kitty interrupted her with a laugh. "Why my dear, he is a mere *child* compared to Raleigh Claiborne. That little affair was the mere A. B. C. of romance. He's paying attention to our youngest now. He sends music and bon bons to *Elise*."

"Think of Elise being old enough to receive such attentions!" groaned Gay. "It makes me feel like a patriarch. But never mind my hoary sensations, go on and tell me some more. She's going to get her trousseau abroad I suppose."

"Only part of it, for the wedding isn't to take place for a year. Allison didn't care much about going — thought she'd rather wait and take the

trip with Raleigh. But he is so busy it may be several years before he can get off for a whole summer, and Aunt Elise persuaded her to go with them. She said it wouldn't be so easy for her to go when she once assumed the responsibility of a big establishment."

Gay clasped her hands around her knees and rocked herself back and forth on the floor.

"I'm glad she's sensible enough to wait a year," she declared. "I don't see why girls are in such a hurry to tie themselves up in a knot. I suppose it's perfectly fascinating to be engaged and to have the choosing of a lovely trousseau, and the opening of all the wedding presents. Everybody takes so much interest in a prospective bride. But the fun comes to an end so quickly. It's like Fourth of July fire works. There's a big blaze and excitement while it lasts. Then it's all over and they settle down to be just prosy common-place married people. I should think that the reaction would be deadly, and that if a girl could see past the time of the rocket's shooting up, and realize that it can't stay among the stars, but must fall to earth again with a dull thud, she'd profit by other people's experiences, and not give up all the good times of her girlhood before she'd half enjoyed them."

Gay spoke so feelingly that her two listeners exchanged glances of surprise. This was not the way Gay had been wont to talk a year ago, and each wondered to herself if Lucy's marriage had caused this radical change in her opinion.

Suddenly she changed the subject, with the unexpectedness of a grasshopper's leap. "Which one of you girls is going to stay all night with me?"

Kitty answered first. "Neither of us ought to, for we've only just returned to the bosom of our families. You could hardly call us entirely arrived yet, for our trunks haven't come."

Lloyd started up, and looked at her watch in alarm. "It's a good thing you reminded me that I have a home," she laughed. "I told mothah I'd just stroll down to the post-office and be right back, and when I met Kitty with yoah lettah it drove everything else out of my head. She'll be wondering what has happened to me. I'll come some night next week and be glad to."

"No, one of you has to come back and stay with me *to-night*," Gay insisted. "So settle it between yourselves. You may as well draw straws to decide which is to be my victim." Then, glancing around the room — "I don't happen to see any straws at

hand, but you might pull hairs for the honour. Here! My head is at your service, ladies."

Dropping to her knees she made a profound salaam, and waited for them to draw. "The one who pulls the shortest hair comes back."

Laughing over the absurd manner of deciding such a matter, each girl reached out and plucked a hair by its roots, so vigorously that the pull was followed by a long drawn "ouch!"

"Mine's the shortest," giggled Lloyd, comparing it with the one that Kitty held up. "But I'm suah my family will object if I propose leaving them the very first night of my arrival, aftah I've been away at school all yeah."

"Don't leave them then," said Gay. "Bring them all over here to spend the evening. I'm wild for Lucy and brother Jameson to meet them as soon as possible. Then when bedtime comes let them leave *you*. Tell them that Kitty is going to bring all her family, and that everybody in the valley who *is* anybody is coming to the Harcourt's Housewarming to-night at the 'Cabin in the Wood.'"

Kitty began unfurling her red parasol. "That certainly sounds alluring. You can count on all my family, especially Ranald, and I'll go straight home and telephone to Alex Shelby."

"Who may he be?" inquired Gay, scrambling up from the floor, to follow her guests down stairs.

Kitty began an enthusiastic description of him, which Lloyd cut short with the laughing remark, "Go look in your little Dutch mirror. I'm not positive, but I *think* he's yoah first 'Knight of the Looking-glass.'"

CHAPTER II

BED-TIME CONFIDENCES

That night a series of interesting shadows trooped across the little Dutch mirror, in the moonlight, but nobody watched beside it to see how faithfully it reflected the procession of guests, straggling up the path below. After the first pleased glance Gay had flown down-stairs to throw open the front door and bid them welcome. It was almost more than she had dared to hope that the old Colonel would come, and " Papa Jack " and Kitty's Grandmother MacIntyre. But they had needed no urging. Gay was reaping the aftermath now, of her first visit to the Valley. They had not forgotten the obliging little guest who had entertained them with her violin playing, amused them with her quaint unexpected speeches, and charmed old and young alike with her enthusiastic interest in everything and everybody.

Ranald had more than that to remember, for he had carried on a vigorous correspondence with Gay

for the last six months, started by a "dare" from Allison. Alex Shelby's memory of her dated back only to that morning, but the picture of a sunny little head up among the roses, and that line "Sandalphon the angel of glory" had been in his thoughts all day.

Their effort to show the newcomers how cordial a Lloydsboro welcome could be, was met by a hospitality which held them in its spell till after midnight. Lucy was in her element. As the popular daughter of a popular army officer, she had played gracious hostess ever since she had learned to talk. As for Gay, so anxious was she that her friends should be pleased with her family and her family with her friends, that she threw herself with all her might into the task of making each show off to the other.

An outside fire-place on the broad front porch was one of the features of the Cabin. The June night was cool enough to make the blaze on its hearth acceptable, and Lucy turned the picturesque old kettle, bubbling on the crane, to practical use, making coffee to serve with the marsh-mallows, which Jameson handed around on long sticks, that each one might toast his own over the glowing coals.

The informality of it all, and the good cheer, made every one relax into his jolliest mood, and Gay, hearing the old Colonel's laugh, as stretched out on the settle by the fire, he told stories and toasted marsh-mallows with a zest, felt that they had struck the right key-note in this first evening's entertainment. It was the harbinger of many others that would follow during the summer.

It was her violin that held them longest. Standing just inside the door where Kitty could accompany her on the piano, she played one after another of the favourite tunes that were called for in turn, till the fire burned low on the porch hearth, and even the voices of the night were stilled in the dense beech woods around the Cabin.

It was later than any one had supposed when Mrs. Sherman made the discovery that the hall clock had stopped.

"She didn't know that I stopped it on purpose," confessed Gay, when the last carriage had driven away, and Lloyd was following her sleepily upstairs. She paused to bolt the bed-room door behind them.

"This has been a lovely evening for me. It gives one such a comfortable I-told-you-so sort of feeling to have everything turn out as you prophesied

it would. Of course I knew that Lucy would feel the charm of the Valley, and like it a thousand times better than the mountains or seashore or anywhere else, but I wasn't so sure of Jameson. Now my mind is completely at rest for the summer. I stopped worrying when I saw him hobnobbing with the Colonel and your father about those Lexington horses he wants to buy. He was so tickled over those letters of introduction they gave him. And he was so charmed to air his knowledge of the Philippines to Mrs. Walton. He spent a month there you know. I fairly patted myself on the back all the time he was talking. Somehow I feel so responsible for this household. There! I forgot to remind them to bring that bothersome old silver pitcher upstairs!"

Hastily unbolting the door she called out in sepulchral tones that echoed through the dark house, *"Remember the Maine!"*

There was a laugh in the room across the hall, then her brother-in-law who had just come upstairs, shuffled down again in his slippers.

"I suppose I'll have to remind them every night this summer," continued Gay. "I don't like to call out 'remember the silver pitcher that was our great-great-grandmother Melville's, and the soup

ladle that some old Spanish grandee gave to one of Jameson's Castilian ancestors,' for if a burglar were prowling around he would be all the more anxious to break in. So the month I visited them, before we came here, I adopted that slogan for my war-cry: '"*Remember the main*" thing in life to be saved from burglars!' It always sends one or the other of them skipping, for they feel the responsibility of preserving such heirlooms for posterity. I used to wish that I were the oldest daughter, so that that pitcher would be handed down to me on my wedding day. I didn't realize what a bore it would be to be tied for life to such a responsibility. I asked Jameson why he didn't put it and the ladle in a safety vault and be done with it, and he read me such a lecture on the sacredness of old associations and family ties that I somehow felt that his old soup-ladle expected me to send it a written apology."

Gay had bolted the door again, and as she talked, drew the curtains across the casement windows. Now she sat on the edge of the bed, shaking out her wealth of sunny hair, to brush and braid it for the night. It was a cosy room, with low ceiling and old-fashioned wall paper. With the curtains drawn and the candles in the quaint pewter sticks

lighting up the claw-footed mahogany furniture, it was an ideal place for the exchanging of bedtime confidences. Gay was the first to break the silence.

"What was the matter with Betty tonight? She was as quiet as a mouse. Hardly had a word to say, and all the time I was playing, she sat looking out into the night as if she were ready to cry."

"No wondah! They were so beautiful, some of those nocturnes and things, that we all had lumps in our throats. Nothing's the mattah with Betty. It's just the last chaptah she can't get to suit her. She's gone around in a sawt of dream all day."

"Who's playing the devoted to her now?"

"Nobody as far as I know. *All* the boys love Betty. They've been perfectly devoted to her ever since she came to Locust to live; but not — not in the sentimental way you mean; for instance the way that Alex Shelby cares for Kitty."

"Oh *don't* tell me there is anything in that," wailed Gay, "at least on Kitty's part, for I've set my heart on her marrying a friend of mine in San Antonio, so she'll always be near me. You know when Mammy Easter told her fortune, it was that her fate would come through running water when the weather vane points *West*. I'm wild to have her visit me at Fort Sam Houston next year, and

this Frank Percival is the very one of all others for her. He's a banker and as good as gold and — oh well, there's no use wasting time singing his praises to *you* when I want him for Kitty! But about this Alex Shelby, Kitty told me this very afternoon that it is *you* he admires so much. She told me all about that Bernice Howe affair, and said that ever since Katie Mallard up and told him how honourably you acted in the matter, he has put you on a pedestal and given you a halo. She said you could have him crazy about you if you'd so much as lift an eyelash in encouragement."

"Don't you believe it!" cried Lloyd. "That's just Kitty's way of throwing you off the track. We've been unusually good friends evah since he found out why I broke my engagement to go riding with him, but he is at The Beeches every bit as much as he is at The Locusts, and it's you he'll be in love with befoah the summah is ovah. He was the first one reflected in yoah looking glass, for he confessed this evening how he sat and watched you on the laddah, and how he'd thought of you all day; and he even quoted poetry about it, and that's a very serious symptom for Alex to show. He nevah was known to do such things befoah! Then tonight he was simply carried away by yoah play-

ing. He adores a violin and you played all his favourites. Oh I see yoah finish!"

There was a pause in which Gay kicked off her slippers and sat absently gazing at them, while Lloyd tied the ribbons which fastened the lace in the collar of her dainty gown. Again it was Gay who spoke first.

"Doesn't it seem queer to think of Allison's being engaged? It is such a little while since we were all school girls together. Nobody knows whose turn will come next. It makes me feel like a soldier on a battle field — comrades being shot down all around you, right and left, and you never knowing how soon it'll be your turn to fall. It's awful! Lloyd, what's become of that boy out in Arizona, the one who sent you those orange-blossoms in Joyce's letter when I was here before? He was best man at Eugenia Forbes' wedding."

"Oh, you mean Phil Tremont!" answered Lloyd placidly, without the conscious blush that Gay had expected to see. "He is out West again, doing splendidly, Eugenia writes."

"I thought you wrote to him yourself."

Lloyd, stooping to pick up her dress and hang it over a chair, did not see with what keen interest Gay watched her as she questioned.

"Oh, we still keep up a sawt of hit and miss correspondence. He writes every few weeks and I manage to reply once in two months or so. It's dreadfully uphill work for me to write to people whom I nevah see. It's been two yeahs since he was heah, and I nevah know what he'll be interested in."

"I suppose it's easier writing to some one you've known all your life, like Malcolm MacIntyre for instance. I'm so sorry he and Keith are abroad this summer."

Lloyd's face dimpled mischievously as she began to see the drift of Gay's questioning. "I can't tell you how easy it is to write to Malcolm, because I've nevah done it. Now it's my turn to ask questions. Where did you get this new photograph of Ranald Walton on yoah dressing table? Beg it from Kitty as you did that one at Warwick Hall, when he was a little cadet, or get it from headquartahs?"

"Direct from headquarters," confessed Gay with a laugh. "He isn't so afraid of girls as he used to be. Wasn't he charming tonight?"

So the questioning and answering went on for quarter of an hour longer, each anxious to find how far the other had drifted into the unexplored coun-

try of their dreams. Then Gay blew out the candles and climbed into the high four-posted bed beside Lloyd, where they lay looking out through the open window into the starlight. The moon had been down for some time. It was so still here in the heart of the beech woods that the silence could almost be felt. The girls spoke in whispers.

"It settles down on one like a pall," said Gay. "Are you sleepy?"

"Not very," answered Lloyd, stifling a yawn.

"Then there's one more person in the valley I want to ask about. I believe I've heard an account of every one else. Where's Rob Moore and what is he doing? I thought he would come over with you all tonight."

"Poah old Rob," answered Lloyd, swallowing another yawn. "His fathah died a little ovah a yeah ago, and he's nevah been like himself since. He seemed to grow into a man in just a few hours. It was awfully sudden — Mistah Moore's death. The shock neahly killed Rob's mothah, and the deah old judge, his grandfathah, you know, was simply heartbroken. Rob just gave up his entire time to them aftah that. He was such a comfort. Nevah left the place, and took charge of all the business mattahs, to spare them every worry.

When things were settled up they found there wasn't as much left as they had thought there would be, and Rob wouldn't touch a cent to finish his law course. He was afraid his mothah would have to deny herself some luxury she had always been used to, and he didn't want her to miss a single one she had had in his fathah's lifetime. So he took a position in Louisville, and has been working like a dawg evah since. He reads law at night with the old Judge, so I scarcely evah see him. We've just drifted apart, till it seems as if the little old Bobby I grew up with is dead and gone. I missed him dreadfully at first, all last summah, for he'd almost lived at our house, and was just like a brothah. I haven't seen him at all this vacation, though to be suah I've only been home this one day."

In the dim starlight Lloyd could not see the complacent smile on Gay's face, but her voice showed that she was well pleased with the answers to her string of questions.

"Now I'll tell you why I put you through such a catechism," she began. "I wanted to make sure that the coast is clear, so that you can undertake a mission that is to be laid at your door this summer. Jameson's brother Leland will be here tomorrow afternoon. If he takes a fancy to the place

he will probably stay as long as we do, and we are all very anxious for him to stay. He's only three years younger than Jameson, but the two were left alone in the world when they were just little tots, and Jameson has been like a father to him. He feels so responsible for him and so does Lucy. I do too, now, although he's only my brother-in-law's brother, because I persuaded them to come here for the summer, and Jameson wanted to go somewhere where Leland would be satisfied to stay."

"What's the mattah with him, that he needs so much looking aftah? If he's twenty-three yeahs old it seems to me that he might take the responsibility of himself on his own shouldahs. Is he wild?"

"No. Jameson says he's always been too high-minded to do the things men mean when they talk about sowing their wild oats; but he is as utterly irresponsible as a will-o-the-wisp. He won't stay tied down to anything — just drifts around, here and there, having a good time. It's a pity that he isn't as poor as a church mouse. Then he'd have to do something. He's so bright he easily could make something splendid of himself. Now Jameson has good sensible ideas about not squandering his money, and although he doesn't have to work

any more than Leland does, he looks after the details of his own business as a man should.

"He knows all about the mines he has stock in down in Mexico, and he studies mineralogy and labour problems and investments, and has an office that he goes to regularly every morning. He takes after his father's side of the house, practical English people. But Leland is like his mother's family (they were proud old Spaniards just a generation or so back). He is adventurous and roving and romantic, and has the *dolce far niente* in the blood. Jameson says that all that Leland needs is to be kept keyed up to the right pitch, for he is so impetuous and headstrong that he always gets what he starts after, no matter what stands in the way; and that if he could just fall heels over head in love with some girl with great force of character, who wouldn't look at him till he'd measured up to her standards, it would be the making of him."

Lloyd yawned. "Excuse me for saying it," she began teasingly, "but I don't see how you can get up so much interest in anybody like that, even if he is yoah brothah-in-law's brothah. It sounds to me as if he is just plain *lazy* and I nevah did have any use for a man that had to be nagged all

the time to keep his ambition up to high-watah mark."

Gay sat up in bed in her earnestness. "Oh Lloyd, don't say that!" she protested. "Don't judge him till you've seen him. He's perfectly dear in lots of ways, in spite of his faults. You'll find him fascinating. Everybody does. And I'm going to be entirely honest with you — I've fairly *prayed* that you'd like him. You are so strong yourself, the strongest character of any girl I know, and you influence people so forcibly in spite of themselves, that I've felt from the start it would be the making of Leland if you'd take him in hand this summer."

Lloyd smothered a laugh in the pillow. "'Why don't you speak for yourself, John,'" she said mischievously. "Why don't *you* take him in hand? You are already interested so much that you'd only be combining pleasuah with duty."

Gay was too much in earnest to tolerate any levity, and went on in her intense eager way. "Oh I've already worn myself out trying to influence him, but it's of no use. He knows me too well. He's called me 'Pug' and 'Red-bird' ever since we went to kindergarten together. I'm just one of the family. But I've showed him your picture

and told him what an unapproachable, unattainable creature you are, and whetted his curiosity till it's as keen as a razor. Oh I've played my little game like an expert, and he doesn't suspect in the faintest degree what I want. He thinks I'm trying to interest him in Kitty Walton. I told him she's the darlingest, jolliest, prettiest thing in ten states, and that I'd guarantee he wouldn't feel bored once this entire summer if he'd make her acquaintance.

"But you — I've painted as so indifferent and entirely above his reach, that just to prove to me I'm mistaken, he'll nearly break his neck to put himself on good terms with you. It's just as Jameson says, he'll ride rough-shod over everything that stands in his way, to get what he wants."

Lloyd raised herself on her elbow and turned a protesting face towards her eloquent bed-fellow.

"Well of all cool things," she began, half inclined to be indignant, yet so amused at Gay's masterly management that the exclamation ended in a giggle. "Where do *I* come in, pray? You say he always gets what he goes aftah. Did it evah occur to you that I might not want to be taken possession of in that high-handed way? That *I* might have something to say in the mattah? Haven't

you as much interest in my welfare as in yoah sistah's husband's brothah?"

"Of course! you blessed little goose!" exclaimed Gay, giving the arm next hers an impetuous squeeze. "Don't I know the haughty Princess well enough to be sure that all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't budge her against her will? I'm not looking ahead any farther than this summer. But if you could just shake him up and put him on his mettle that long, that's all I ask of you. And seriously, dear, you might go the world over and not find one who measures up to your ideals in more ways. He's well born and talented and rich and fairly good-looking. He's so entertaining one never tires of his company, good-hearted and generous to a fault, and — Oh Lloyd, *please* say you'll take enough interest to keep him keyed up to the right pitch for awhile. It's all he lacks to make a splendid man."

"Do you know, I think that's a mighty big lack," said Lloyd, honestly. "I've had strings on my harp that wouldn't stay strung. It's the most exasperating thing in the world. You know how it is, with a violin. Right in the midst of the loveliest passages one will begin to slip back — just a trifle, maybe, not more than a hair's breadth, but

enough to make it flat and spoil the harmony. Then you stop and tune it up again, and go on for awhile, but back it will slip just when you've gotten to depending on it. You know I couldn't have any respect for a man who had to be kept up to the notch that way. It would spoil the whole thing to have him flat on a single note when I'd depended on him to ring clear and true."

Gay had no reply ready for this unexpected argument, and her experience with stringed instruments made it very forcible. It was several minutes before she answered, then she spoke triumphantly.

"But you know what a master can do where a novice would fail. He can fit the keys to hold any position he gives them. Leland has never felt the touch of a master-hand. No one has ever controlled him. He has always been petted and spoiled. He has never known a girl like you. I'm sure that if you were only willing to make the attempt to arouse his pride and ambition, you could do wonders for him."

It was the most potent appeal Gay could have made. To feel that her influence may sway a man to higher, better things, will make even the most frivolous girl draw quicker breath with a sense of power, and to a conscientious girl like Lloyd this

seemed an opportunity and a responsibility that could not be lightly thrust aside.

"Well," she said finally, after a moment of hesitation, "I'll try."

Gay reached over with an impulsive kiss. "Oh you *dear!* I knew you would. Now I can let you go to sleep in peace. 'Something accomplished, something done, has earned a night's repose.' It must be awfully late. Goodnight dear."

Long after Gay had fallen asleep, Lloyd lay thinking of the mission thus thrust upon her. If this Leland Harcourt had needed reforming, she told herself, she wouldn't have had anything to do with him. Her poor Violet's experience with Ned Bannon had taught her one lesson — how mistaken any girl is who thinks she can accomplish *that.* But to be the master-hand that could put in tune some really splendid instrument (ah, Gay's appeal was subtle and strong) *any* girl would be glad and proud to be *that:* the inspiration, the power for good, the beckoning hand that would lead a man to the noblest heights of attainment.

There was something exhilarating, uplifting in the thought, that banished sleep. Night often brings exalted moods that seem absurd next day. Lying there, looking out at the stars, the pleasing

fancy came to her that each one was a sacred altar-flame, given into the keeping of some unseen vestal virgin. Now she too had joined this star-world Sisterhood, and had lighted a vestal fire on the altar of a promise. In its constant watch, she would keep tryst with all that Life demanded of her.

CHAPTER III

A KNIGHT COMES RIDING

NEXT morning Lloyd found that her exalted mood had faded away with the stars. Any fire must pale before the broad light of day, and her vestal-maiden fervour had given place to a very lively but mundane interest in the brother-in-law's brother.

She was glad to hear at breakfast that he liked tennis, was a good horseman, that private theatricals were always a success when he had a hand in them. She stored away in her memory for future use, the information that he had lived several years in Spain and Mexico, and spoke Spanish like a native, that unlike Jameson he was prouder of his Castilian ancestors than his English ones, and that two of his fads were collecting pipes and rare old ivory carvings.

The more she heard about him the less sure she felt of being able to keep her promise to Gay. It began to seem presumptuous to her that a mere school-girl should imagine that she could exert any

"DREW REIN A MOMENT AT THE GATE, TO LOOK DOWN THE STATELY AVENUE."

influence over such an accomplished man of the world as he evidently was. All that day she pictured to herself at intervals how she should meet him and what she should say. It was a new experience for the haughty Princess who had always been so indifferent to the opinions of her boy friends. Gay's request had made her self-conscious. Fortunately she had a glimpse of him before he saw her, which helped her to adjust herself to the rôle she wanted to assume.

The morning after his arrival in the Valley, he and Ranald rode past the Locusts, and drew rein a moment at the gate, to look down the stately avenue which was always pointed out to strangers. Lloyd watched their approach from behind a leafy screen of lilac bushes. The gleam of a wild strawberry had lured her over there from the path, a few minutes before. Then the discovery of a patch of four-leaf clovers near by had tempted her to a seat on the grass. She was arranging the long stems of the clovers in a cluster when the sound of hoof-beats made her look up.

So thickset were the lilacs between her and the road that not a glimpse of her white dress or the flutter of a ribbon betrayed her presence, and they paused to admire the avenue, unknowing that a far

prettier picture was hidden away a few yards from them, in full sound of their voices — a girl half lying in the grass, with June's own fresh charm in her glowing face, and the sunshine throwing dappled leaf shadows over her soft fair hair. The mischievous light in her hazel eyes deepened as she watched them.

"'The knights come riding two by two,'" she quoted in a whisper, closely scrutinizing the stranger.

"He rides well, anyhow," was her first thought. The next was that he looked much older than Gay's description had led her to imagine. Probably it was because he wore a moustache, while Rob and Malcolm and Alex and Ranald were all smooth-shaven. Maybe it was that same black moustache, with the gleam of white teeth and the flashing glance of his black eyes that gave him that dashing cavalier sort of look. How wonderfully his dark face lighted up when he smiled, and how distinctly one recalled it when he had passed on. And yet it wasn't a handsome face. She wondered wherein lay its charm.

Gay's words recurred to her: "So fiery and impetuous he would ride rough-shod over anything that stood in his way to get what he wants."

"He looks it" she thought, raising her head a trifle to watch them out of sight. "I'm afraid I can't do as much for him as Gay expects for I'll simply not stand his putting on any of his lordly ways with *me.*" Gathering up her clovers, she started back to the house, her head held high unconsciously, in her most Princess-like pose.

Some one else had watched the passing of the two young men on horseback. From his arm chair on the white pillared porch, old Colonel Lloyd reached out to the wicker table beside him for his field-glass, to focus it on the distant entrance gate.

"I don't seem to place them" he said aloud. "It looks like young Walton on the roan, but the other one is a stranger in these parts."

Then as he saw they were not coming in, he shifted the glass to other objects. Slowly his gaze swept the landscape from side to side, till it rested on Lloyd, sitting on the grass by the lilac thicket, sorting her lapful of clovers.

Something in her childish occupation and the sunny gleam of the proud little head bowed intently over her task, recalled another scene to the old Colonel; that morning when through this same glass he had watched her first entrance into Locust. Was it fourteen or fifteen years ago? It seemed

only yesterday that he had found her near that same spot coolly feeding his choicest strawberries to an elfish looking dog. Time had gone so fast since his imperious little grand-daughter had come into his life to fill it with new interests and deeper meaning. Yes, it certainly seemed no longer ago than yesterday that she was tyrannizing over him in her adorable baby fashion, making an abject slave of him, whom every one else feared. And now here she was coming towards him across the lawn, a tall, fair girl in the last summer of her teens. Why Amanthis was no older than she when he had brought her home to Locust, a bride. And no doubt some one would be coming soon, wanting to carry away Lloyd, the light of his eyes and the life of the place.

It made him angry to think of it, and when she stopped beside his chair to give him a soft pat on the cheek her first remark sent a jealous twinge through him.

"So *that's* who the stranger was with young Walton" he responded. "*Humph!* I don't think much of him."

"But grandfathah, how could you tell at such a distance?" laughed Lloyd. "It isn't fair to form an opinion at such long range. You'd bettah come

with us tonight again ovah to the Cabin, and make his acquaintance. There's to be anothah housewahming, especially for him. Kitty and Ranald are engineering it. They've invited all the young people in the neighbourhood — sawt of a surprise you know. At least they call it that, although Gay and Lucy are expecting us. Even Rob is going, for Kitty waylaid him as he got off the train yestahday evening, and talked him into consenting."

"I'm glad of that" answered the old Colonel heartily. "'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' This last year has been hard on the lad. The Judge tells me he's never left the place a single night since his Daddy died. He just grinds along in that hardware store all day, and is into his law books as soon as he gets home. He's getting to be an old man before his time. I'm glad your little friend Gay is here this summer, on his account, if for no other reason. She'll draw him out of his shell if anybody can. I remember how much he seemed to be taken with her that Christmas Vacation she spent in the Valley."

Lloyd gaped at him in astonishment. "Why grandfathah! I nevah dreamed that you noticed things like *that!*"

"I certainly do, my dear" he answered playfully.

"I was young myself once upon a time. It's easy to recognize familiar landmarks on a road you've travelled. But why," he said suddenly in a changed tone, "if I may be so bold as to ask, *why* is this young Texan to be ushered into the valley with this blare of trumpets and torchlight effect? It he anything out of the ordinary?"

"No, but it will make him feel that he hasn't dropped down into a poky inland village with nothing doing, but into a lovely social whirl instead. They want him to be so pleased with the place that he'll be satisfied to stay all summah."

It was almost on the tip of her tongue to tell why his family were so desirous of keeping him with them, but another scornful "*humph!*" checked her. For some unaccountable reason the old Colonel seemed to have taken a dislike to this stranger, and she knew that this information would deepen it to such an extent, that he would not want her to have anything to do with him.

"He'd be furious if he knew what I promised Gay," she thought, "for he takes such violent prejudices that the least thing 'adds fuel to the flame.' He might not want me to let him call heah or anything."

"What do you keep saying '*humph!*' to me

foh?" she asked saucily, "when I'm trying to tell you the news and am so kind and polite as to ask you to go to the pahty with us. It's dreadful to have such an old ogah of a grandfathah, who makes you shake in yoah shoes every time he opens his mouth."

Her arm was round his neck as she spoke, and her cheek pressed against his. The caress drove away every other thought save that it was good to have his little Colonel home again, and he gave a pleased chuckle as she went on scolding him in a playful manner that no one else in the world ever dared assume with him. But all the while that she was twisting his white moustache, and braiding his Napoleon-like goatee into a funny little tail, she was thinking about the evening, and the indifferent air with which she intended to meet Leland Harcourt. She would have to be indifferent, and oblivious of his existence as far as she could politely, because Gay had told him that she was unapproachable and unattainable. She would talk to Rob most of the evening, she decided. She was glad that she would have the opportunity, for she had not seen him since coming home. He had called at The Locusts the night after her return from school,

but that was the night she had stayed at the Cabin with Gay, and she had missed him.

"Did you know that your trunks came while you were at the post-office?" asked the Colonel presently. Owing to some mistake in checking their baggage in Washington, Lloyd's trunks had been delayed, and she had been wearing some of Betty's clothes the two days she had been at home.

"Why didn't you tell me soonah?" she asked, springing up from her seat on the arm of his chair. "I've been puzzling my brains all mawning ovah what I could weah tonight." Hastily gathering up the handful of clovers that she had dropped on the wicker table, she ran upstairs. Everything in her pink bower of a room was in confusion. Her Commencement gown lay on the bed like an armful of thistledown, with her gloves and lace fan beside it. On the mantel stood the little white slippers in which she had tripped across the rostrum at Warwick Hall to receive her diploma from Madam Chartley's hands. Now the diploma with its imposing red seals and big blue satin bow, was reposing on top of the clock on the same mantel with the slippers, and from the open trunks which Mom Beck was unpacking, a motley collection of books,

clothing, sorority banners and school-girl souvenirs flowed out all over the floor.

The old coloured woman was garrulous this morning. Her trip to Washington "with all her white folks, to her baby's Finishment" (she couldn't understand why it should be called Commencement), had been the event of her life; and when she could get no one else to listen, she talked to herself, recounting each incident of her journey with unctuous enjoyment.

She was on her knees now before one of the trunks, talking so earnestly into its depths, that Lloyd, entering the room, looked around to see who her audience could be. At the sound of Lloyd's step the monologue came to a sudden stop, and the wrinkled old face turned with a smile.

"What you want me to do with all these yeah school books, honey, now you done with 'em fo' evah?"

"Mercy, Mom Beck! don't talk as if I had come to the end of every thing, and am too old to study any moah! I expect to keep up my French and German all next wintah, even if I am a débutante. Don't you remembah what Madam Chartley said in her lovely farewell speech to the graduating

class? What's the good of taking you to Commencement, if that's all the impression it made?"

A pleased cackle of a laugh answered her. "Law, honey, I couldn't listen to speeches! I was too busy thinkin' of Becky Potah in her black silk dress that ole Cun'l give me for the grand occasion, an' the purple pansies in my bonnet. The queen o' Sheby couldn't held a can'le to me *that* day."

She was off on another chapter of reminiscences now, but Lloyd paid no attention. As she picked up the books and found places for them on the low shelves that filled one side of the room, she felt as if she were assisting at the last sad rites of something very dear; for each page was eloquent with happy memories of her last year at school. Every scribbled margin recalled some pleasant recitation hour, and most of the fly-leaves were decorated by Kitty's ridiculous caricatures. She and Kitty had been room-mates this last year.

In order to find place for these books, which she had just brought home, she had to carry a row of old ones down to the library. They were juvenile tales, most of them, which she laid aside; girls' stories that had once been a never failing source of delight. She could remember the time (and not so very long ago, either) when it had seemed impossi-

ble that she could out-grow them. And now as she trailed down stairs with an armful of her old favourites, she felt as if the shadowy figure of her childhood, the little Lloyd that used to be, followed her with reproachful glances for her disloyalty to these discarded friends.

On her way back to her room for a second armful, she stopped outside Betty's door for a moment, hoping to hear some noise within, which would indicate that Betty was not at her desk. There was so much that she wanted to talk to her about. One of the things she had looked forward to most eagerly in her home-coming was the long, sisterly talks they would have together. Now it was a disappointment to find her so absorbed in her writing that she was as inaccessible as if she had withdrawn into a cloister.

"I'll be glad when the old book is finished" thought Lloyd impatiently as she tip-toed away from the door. To her, Betty's ability to write was a mysterious and wonderful gift. Not for anything would she have interrupted her when "genius burned," but she resented the fact that it should rise between them as it had done lately. Even when Betty was not shut up in her room actually at work, her thoughts seemed to be on it. She was

living in a world of her own creating, more interested in the characters of her fancy than those who sat at table with her. Since beginning the last chapter she had been so preoccupied and absent-minded, that Lloyd hardly knew her. She was so unlike the old Betty, the sympathetic confidante and counsellor, who had been interested in even the smallest of her griefs and joys.

If Lloyd could have looked on the other side of the closed door just then, the expression on Betty's face would have banished every feeling of impatience or resentment, and sent her quietly away to wait and wonder, while Betty passed through one of the great hours of her life.

With a tense, earnest face bent over the manuscript, she reached the climax of her story — the last page, the last paragraph. Then with a throbbing heart, she halted a moment, pen in hand, before adding the words, *The End*. She wrote them slowly, reverently almost, and then realizing that the ambition of her life had been accomplished, looked up with an expression of child-like awe in her brown eyes. It was done at last, the work that she had pledged herself to do so long ago, back there in the little old wooden church at the Cuckoo's Nest.

For a time she forgot the luxurious room where she sat, and was back at the beginning of her ambition and high resolves, in that plain old meeting house in the grove of cedars. Again she tiptoed down the empty aisle, that was as still as a tomb, save for the buzzing of a wasp at the open window through which she had climbed. Again she opened the little red book-case above the back pew, that held the remnants of a scattered Sunday-school library. The queer musty smell of the time-yellowed volumes floated out to her as strong as ever, mingling with the warm spicy scent of pinks and cedar, from the graveyard just outside the open window.

Those tattered books, read in secret to Davy on sunny summer afternoons, had been the first voices to whisper to her that she too was destined to leave a record behind her. And now that she had done it, they seemed to call her back to that starting place. Sitting there in happy reverie, she wished that she could make a pilgrimage back to the little church. She would like to slip down its narrow aisle just when the afternoon sun was shining yellowest on its worn benches and old altar, and dropping on her knees as she had done years ago in a transport of gratitude, whisper a happy

"Thank you, God" from the depths of a glad little heart.

Presently the whisper did go up from her desk where she sat with her face in her hands. Then reaching out for the last volume of the white and gold series that chronicled her good times, she opened it to where a blotter kept the place at a half written page, and added this entry.

"June 20th. Truly a red-letter day, for hereon endeth my story of '*Aberdeen Hall*.' The book is written at last. Two chapters are still to be copied on the typewriter, but the 'web' itself is woven, and ready to be cut from the loom. I am glad now that I waited; that I did not attempt to publish anything in my teens. The world looks very different to me now at twenty. I have outgrown my early opinions and ideals with my short dresses, just as Mrs. Walton said we would. Now the critics can say 'Thou waitedst till thy woman's fingers wrought the best that lay within thy woman's heart.' I can say honestly I have put the very best of me into it, and the feeling of satisfaction that I have accomplished the one great thing I started out to do so many years ago, gives me more happiness I am sure, than any 'diamond leaf' that any prince could bring."

Such elation as was Betty's that hour, seldom comes to one more than once in a life-time. Years afterward her busy pen produced far worthier books, which were beloved and bethumbed in thousands of libraries, but none of them ever brought again that keen inward thrill, that wave of intense happiness which surged through her warm and sweet, as she sat looking down on that first completed manuscript. She was loath to lay it aside, for the joy of the creator possessed her, and in the first flush of pleased surveyal of her handiwork, she humbly called it good.

She went down to lunch in such an uplifted frame of mind that she seemed to be walking on air. But Betty was always quiet, even in her most intense moments. Save for the brilliant colour in her cheeks and the unusual light in her eyes there was no sign of her inward excitement. She slipped into her seat at table with the careless announcement "Well, it's finished."

It was Lloyd who made all the demonstration amid the family congratulations. Waving her napkin with one hand and clicking two spoons together like castanets, she sprang from her chair and rushed around the table to give vent to her

pleasure by throwing her arms around Betty in a delighted embrace.

"Oh you little mouse!" she cried. "How can you sit there taking it so calmly? If I had done such an amazing thing as to write a book, I'd have slidden down the ban'istahs with a whoop, to announce it, and come walking in on my hands instead of my feet.

"Of co'se I'm just as proud of it as the rest of the family are" she added when she had expended her enthusiasm and gone back to her seat, "but now that it's done I'll confess that I've been jealous of that old book evah since I came home, and I'm mighty glad it's out of the way. Now you'll have time to take some interest in what the rest of us are doing, and you'll feel free to go in, full-swing, for the celebration at the Cabin tonight."

All the rest of that day seemed a fête day to Betty. Her inward glow lent a zest to the doing of even the most trivial things, and she prepared for the gaieties at the Cabin, as if it were her own entertainment, pleased that this red-letter occasion of her life should be marked by some kind of a celebration. It was to do honour to the day and not to the Harcourt's guest, that she arrayed herself in her most becoming gown.

Rob dropped in early, quite in the old way as if there had never been a cessation of his daily visits, announcing that he had come to escort the girls to the Cabin. Lloyd who was not quite ready, leaned over the banister in the upper hall for a glimpse of her old playmate, intending to call down some word of greeting; but he looked so grave and dignified as he came forward under the hall chandelier to shake hands with Betty, that she drew back in silence.

The next instant she resented this new feeling of reserve that seemed to rise up and wipe out all their years of early comradery. Why shouldn't she call down to him over the banister as she had always done? she asked herself defiantly. He was still the same old Rob, even if he had grown stern and grave looking. She leaned over again, but this time it was the sight of Betty that stopped her. She had never seen her so beaming, so positively radiant. In that filmy yellow dress, she might have posed as the Daffodil Maid. Her cheeks were still flushed, her velvety brown eyes luminous with the joy of the day's achievement.

Lloyd watched her a moment in fascinated admiration, as she stood laughing and talking under the hall light. Then she saw that Rob was just as

much impressed with Betty's attractiveness as she was, and was looking at her as if he had made a discovery.

His pleased glance and the frank compliment that followed sent a thought into Lloyd's mind that made her wonder why it had never occurred to her before. How well Betty would fit into the establishment over at Oaklea. What a dear daughter she would make to Mrs. Moore, and what a joy she would be to the old Judge! Rob seemed to be finding her immensely entertaining. Well, there was no need for her to hurry down now. She could take her time about changing her dress.

Lloyd could not have told what had made her decide so suddenly that her dress needed changing. She had put on a pale green dimity that she liked because it was simple and cool-looking, but now after a glance into the mirror she began to slip it off.

"It looks like a wilted lettuce leaf," she said petulantly to her reflection, realizing that nothing but white could hold its own when brought in contact with Betty's gown. That pale exquisite shade of glowing yellow would be the dominating colour in any place it might be worn.

"I must live up to Gay's expectations," she thought, "so white it shall be, Señor Harcourt!"

His dark face with its flashing smile rose before her, and stayed in the foreground of her thoughts, all the time she was arraying herself in her daintiest, fluffiest white organdy. Clasping the little necklace of Roman pearls around her throat, and catching up her lace fan, she swept up to the mirror for a last anxious survey. It was a thoroughly satisfactory one, and with a final smoothing of ribbons she smiled over her shoulder at the charming reflection.

"Now I'll go down and practise my airs and graces on Rob and Betty for awhile. But I'll leave them in peace after we get to the Cabin, for if there should be any possibility of their beginning to care for each othah, I wouldn't get in the way for worlds. Now *this* is the way I'll sail in to meet Mistah Harcourt!"

Thus it happened that the hauteur with which she intended to impress him was in her manner when she swept in to greet Rob. It was not meant for Rob but it had the same effect as if it were, making him feel as if she wished to drop the friendly familiarity of their school days, and meet him on the footing of a recent acquaintance. He had been looking forward all year to her home-coming, and now it gave him a vague sense of disappointment and injury, that she should be as con-

ventionally gracious to him as if he were the veriest stranger. His eyes followed her wistfully, as if looking for something very precious which he had lost.

Wholly unconscious of the way she was spoiling the evening for him Lloyd went on playing the part of Serene Highness, laid out for her. Never to Gay's admiring eyes had she seemed more beautiful, more the fair unattainable Princess, than she was in her meeting with Leland Harcourt. Gay wanted to pat her on the back, for she saw that she had made the very impression expected of her. Long practice had made Gay quick in interpreting Leland's slightest change of expression, and she was well pleased now with what she read in his face.

But to Lloyd, the dark, smiling eyes, regarding everything with a slightly amused expression, showed nothing more than the superficial interest which ordinary politeness demanded of him. He made some pretty speech about the Valley and his pleasure in meeting its charming people, and then stood talking only long enough to make her feel that Gay was right in her estimate of him. He *was* entertaining, even fascinating in his manner, more entertaining than any man she had ever met. But just as she reached this conclusion she found her-

self handed over in some unaccountable way to some one else, and that was the last of his attention to her that night.

He seemed immensely entertained by Kitty, and much interested in Betty and the fact that she had finished writing a book that very day. Gay heralded her advent with that news. Lloyd could overhear little scraps of conversation that made her long to have a share in it. His repartee was positively brilliant she found herself thinking; the kind that one reads of in books, but never hears elsewhere.

For the first time in her life Lloyd felt herself calmly and deliberately ignored, just as she had planned to ignore him.

"Maybe it's because Gay told him that I would be so indifferent," she thought, "and he doesn't think it worth the effort to put himself out to make me be nice to him. I don't care."

Nevertheless a little feeling of disappointment and pique crept in to spoil her evening also, for in the limited wisdom of her school-girl experiences she did not recognize that this worldly-wise young man was ignoring her because he *was* interested; that he had only adopted her own tactics as the surest way of gaining his end.

CHAPTER IV

BETTY'S NOVEL

It was Gay's voice over the telephone. "Oh Lloyd, *can't* you come? Do arrange it some way. Lucy is frightened stiff at the thought of being left here alone all night with just me. And she thought it would be such a good time for Betty to read us her novel, as she promised, before she sends it away to the publishers. There'll be no callers to interrupt us on such a rainy day."

"Hold the phone a minute," answered Lloyd. "I'll see. It's Gay," she explained to her mother who had come out into the hall at the first tinkle of the bell, thinking the summons might be for her.

"Mistah Harcourt and his brothah went to Lexington this mawning to buy those hawses, and Gay and Lucy are afraid to stay there tonight. The cook had promised to sleep at the house, but something turned up at her home a little while ago to prevent. So they want Kitty and Betty and me to

come ovah right away and spend the aftahnoon and night. It's raining cataracts and I know you don't like to take the new carriage out in such weathah, but couldn't Alec put the curtains on the old one?"

Mrs. Sherman glanced dubiously towards the windows, against which the rain was beating in torrents.

"And leave me all alone, when I've been looking forward to this same good, rainy afternoon with you," almost slipped from Mrs. Sherman's tongue. But the eager desire shining in the faces of both girls kept back the words.

"It's only a warm summer rain," interposed Betty, seeing her hesitate.

"Very well, then," consented Mrs. Sherman with a smile, but as she went back to her room she stifled a little sigh of disappointment. "I suppose it's only natural they should want to be going," she thought. "But if it wasn't so selfish I could almost wish that Gay hadn't come to the Valley for the summer. She will take Lloyd away from home so often, and I have looked forward so long to the companion she would be when her school days were ended."

Wholly unconscious of her mother's disappoint-

ment Lloyd was answering merrily, "We'll be ovah right away! Ring up Kitty again, and tell her we'll drive by for her."

An hour later the five girls (for the bride of a year seemed the youngest of them all at times) were seated in an upstairs room at the Lindsey Cabin, each in a comfortable rocking chair. Lucy had taken them to her room saying it was cozier up near the roof where they could hear the rain patter on the shingles. Also her dormer windows faced the West, and they would have daylight longer there.

It took a little while for them to get settled for the reading. Lucy brought out the family darning with a matronly air, when she saw that Lloyd had brought a square of linen to start a piece of drawn-work, and Kitty had some napkins to hem. Mrs. Walton had turned over the management of the house to Kitty only that day (Allison had had it the year before) and with house-wifely zeal she had begun with an exploration of the linen closet where she had found a pile of unhemmed linen.

Not wanting to be idle while all the rest were occupied, Gay kept them waiting while she burrowed through her trunk for an intricate piece of knitting work which she had begun two years be-

fore. It had been intended for a Christmas present, and she had brought it with her intending to finish it before another Christmas or perish in the attempt. "Don't pay any attention to me," she warned. "There'll be places where I have to stop and count stitches and fairly wrestle with it, but I'll be listening in spite of my bodily contortions."

They were all ready at last, so Betty picked up the first chapter and cleared her throat. She had been anxious to read her novel to the girls, she had been so sure of its merit. But now as she glanced down the page she was assailed by misgivings. After all she might not have been an impartial judge, and maybe it wasn't as good as it seemed to her.

"You'll recognize some of the incidents," she explained, "and one character is a composite portrait of three Lloydsboro people. He looks like Mr. Jaynes, stutters like Captain Bedel and has experiences that once happened to Doctor Shelby. I've put Miss Marietta Waring's romance into it too."

Betty read well. She loved the characters she had fashioned, and with her sympathetic voice to interpret them, they became almost as real to her listeners as they were to herself. Presently the

girls began to exchange approving nods. She watched them from the corner of her eye. Now and then there were low murmurs of approbation at some particularly pleasing incident or turn of expression, and at the end of the first chapter there was outspoken applause. They complimented enthusiastically while Betty rested and took breath for the next.

As she felt the genuine pleasure she was affording them, all her fears as to its short-comings fled. She began to see that her story was even better than she had thought it. She saw it in better perspective through their eyes. Its plot moved so smoothly. There was more life, more *go* in it than she had been conscious of in her solitary readings. It was certainly worth all the painstaking effort it had cost her. She could look at it now and no longer humbly, but confidently call it good.

When in one scene she stole a furtive glance around to note the effect, and caught Lucy stealthily slipping out her handkerchief, Gay looking up with tears on her lashes and Lloyd with the peculiar tightening of the lips that showed she was trying to swallow the lump in her throat, she was so happy she could have sung for joy. She read on and on, and they forgot the rain beating against the win-

dows, forgot everything but their interest in the story.

Lucy pushed her darning basket aside and leaned back in her chair, her hands clasped behind her head. The work over which Lloyd had been bending, dropped in her lap and her little gold thimble rolled away into a corner unheeded. There was a personal interest in the story for each of them. Lloyd saw herself as plainly in Betty's heroine as she could see her reflection in the mirror door of the huge mahogany wardrobe opposite her. Some of Kitty's ridiculous speeches that had become historical in her family, found a place here and there, and once Lucy laughed outright, exclaiming, "Why that's just like Gay! You must have been thinking of her when you wrote it."

The reading went on without interruption until it was so dark that Betty had to hold her manuscript close to the window. "I'll ring for lights," thought Lucy, "just as soon as she comes to the end of this chapter." But with the end of the chapter came Ca'line Allison with a message from the kitchen. Lucy started up in dismay.

"There! I forgot all about that salad. How could I be so careless when I'm to have a real live

authoress to dinner? I was so interested I hadn't a thought for anything but the story."

"Such appreciation is a thousand times better than salad," laughed Betty, so jubilant over her triumph that her eyes were full of a happy light. "This is a good place to stop until after dinner. I've read until my throat is tired."

Lucy hurried down stairs to hasten the dinner preparations, in order that they might get back to the reading as soon as possible. The four girls folded their work, and sat in the twilight, talking.

"What does this make you think of?" asked Lloyd.

"I know what's in your mind," answered Kitty. "I was just about to speak of it myself; that rainy day at Boarding School, when Ida Shane read 'The Fortune of Daisy Dale' to us, behind locked doors. Wasn't it thrilling?"

Gay who had heard the incident mentioned many times at Warwick Hall, said plaintively, "You girls always make me feel that I have missed half my life, because I wasn't with you when Ida Shane read that story. I'd certainly like to get my hands on such a wonderful piece of literature."

"But it wasn't wonderful," Betty hastened to explain. "It made that deep impression on us sim-

ply because it was the first novel we had ever read. It was sentimental and melodramatic and trashy as we've since discovered, but then it seemed all that was lovely and romantic. It gave us thrills up and down our spines and sent us around with our heads in the clouds for days. We were seeing embryo Guy Wolverings in every boy we met. As I listened to Ida I thought that if I could only write a book that would hold my listeners spell-bound as that held us, I'd ask no more of life. I could die happy."

"Well, you've done it, dear," said Gay warmly. "We scarcely breathed during the last two chapters, and I'm so eager to know how it ends that I'd willingly cut dinner to go on with it."

"Now how does that make you feel, Miss Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis?" asked Kitty teasingly. "Fair uplifted, I've nae doot."

"Yes, it does," was the honest answer. "It's what I've hoped for and worked for and prayed for these last ten years. Can you wonder that it makes me radiantly happy to have you girls think that I have in a measure succeeded?"

Dinner was announced a little later, and when the girls went into the dining-room, they found Lucy herself bringing it in

"Poor Sylvia had another message from home," she explained, "so I told her and Ca'line Allison to go on; that we'd wait on ourselves and clear the table, and they could wash the dishes in the morning. It's not raining quite so hard now, but it is dark as a pocket outside."

As she placed the soup tureen on the table, they heard the outer kitchen door close, and Sylvia turn the key in the lock.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Lucy with a shiver. "Now we're abandoned to our fate! I wish you'd pull that window-shade farther down, Gay. There's just room for somebody to peep under it, and there's nothing more terrifying to me than the thought of eyes peering in at one from the outer darkness."

"'The gobelins will git you if you don't watch out,'" sang Gay. "Do for pity's sake put your mind on something else, Lucy, and don't spoil this festive occasion with a case of high jinks!"

Seeing that their little hostess was really nervous and timid, Kitty began to divert them all by impersonating different characters in the Valley. She was a fine mimic, and kept them laughing all through the first course. Lucy carried out the plates, and hurried back with the second course.

"You've got to get the salad when the time

comes," she said to Gay. "It's so spooky out there in the kitchen with Sylvia gone, that I was afraid to look over my shoulder. Queer, isn't it! For it's just as warm and well-lighted and cheerful now as when she was there. I wouldn't go into the pantry alone for a fortune."

"Nonsense!" cried Kitty. "Five valiant females are enough to keep any Lloydsboro foe at bay. We'll be your brave defenders."

Gay, who had risen to circle around the table with a plate of hot biscuit, paused dramatically beside Lucy's chair to say in a stage whisper, "Hist! I have a weapon of defence ye wot not of. One that a doughty knight did leave behind him."

"Oh," said the literal Lucy. "I suppose you mean Mr. Shelby's boxing-glove that he left on the piano, when he came in yesterday to bring you those books. It was awfully funny, girls, the way he *seemed* to leave it by accident. I couldn't help laughing, for it was so evident he did it on purpose, to have an excuse to come again sooner than he would have done otherwise."

Gay smiled knowingly. It was not a boxing-glove she meant, but for reasons of her own she did not enlighten Lucy as to the kind of weapon

she had in reserve. It was after eight when they rose from the table, and they made such a frolic of carrying out the dishes, that the grandfather clock on the stairs chimed the half-hour as they finished.

Before Ca'line Allison left she had started a cheerful blaze in the fireplace of the huge living room, for the night was chilly as well as damp. But Lucy partly covered it with ashes, and proposed spending the evening up-stairs.

"Somehow one feels so much safer up-stairs when there are no men in the house," she explained. "We'll light two big lamps, and that will make it as warm and cosy as if we had a fire."

So in a body they made the rounds of the down-stairs rooms, bolting windows and locking doors. Then satisfied that every entrance was securely fastened, they went up-stairs to resume the reading. This time there was no attempt to do any needlework. With folded hands they waited in expectant silence, while Betty found her place. But just as she raised the sheet of paper, the great door of the mahogany wardrobe swung slowly and stealthily open. Not a sound did it make, and there was something so ghostly in its silent undoing that Lucy gave a little shriek and hid her face in

her hands. Each one of them acknowledged to a queer chilly sensation just for an instant, even Gay, who explained that it was only a little habit that the wardrobe had. "I don't mind it in the daytime," she added, "but it *is* spooky at night when everything is still to have it unexpectedly pop open, and swing out with that slow gliding motion."

"It's because the latch is worn and the catch works loose," said matter-of-fact Kitty, who had crossed the room to examine it. She turned the key. "Now it will not interrupt us for awhile. Go on with the story, Betty."

Again the manuscript was raised and again Lucy stopped her with the wail, "Oh, Gay! We've forgotten to bring up the silver pitcher and Jameson's ladle. I put them on the dining-room table after I'd washed them, and then marched off and forgot them."

"Well, I'll go down for them," volunteered Gay. "There's no use in your doing it and getting another fit of shivers."

"The other three sprang up, but Gay waved Betty back.

"Save your breath for the reading. Kitty and Lloyd will be enough. I don't mind acknowledging

that I'll be glad to have both a rear and a van guard going through that dark hall."

Lighting a candle and holding it high above her head, Lloyd led the way down-stairs. Gay was inwardly quaking, for she was almost as timid as her sister, but the fearlessness of her two companions made her keep up a pretence of bravery. As the three pairs of little heels clattered down the dark polished steps, Lloyd and Kitty kept time in a singsong chant:

> "There was a man and he had naught
> And robbers came to rob him.
> He got up on the chimney top
> And then they thought they had him.
> But he got down on the other side
> And then they couldn't find him.
> He went *fourteen miles in fifteen days*
> And never looked behind him."

It was almost cruel of Kitty to seize that opportunity to tell the scariest burglar tale that she had ever heard, but a fine appreciation of dramatic situations urged her to it.

"Ugh! Don't!" begged Gay, as they filed into the dining-room and began looking around for the silver heirlooms. Lucy was mistaken. It was the kitchen table on which she had left them.

"The goose-flesh is standing out all over me! That's the most gruesome tale I ever heard."

"But I'm in the most interesting part," insisted Kitty. "When she saw the black face leering over the transom —"

"Hush!" chattered Gay. "I won't listen to another word. It's so creepy I can feel things grabbing at my ankles. Let me have the candle a minute, please, Lloyd, I want to get something out of the hat-rack drawer."

There was a faint glow on the hearth from the few embers Lucy had left uncovered, and the two stood within it as they waited for Gay to come back with the candle. Kitty went on with her tale, for Lloyd was as fearless as herself. She did not get further than a sentence or two, however, before Gay came hurrying back. To their astonishment she blew out the candle as she reached them, and in the brief glimpse they had of her face they saw that it was ghastly white. In the dim glow of the embers they were scarcely visible to each other. She clutched them with trembling fingers.

"There's some one prowling around the house!" she whispered. "Some one was creeping around under the windows, and then up on the porch. I

heard them plain as day. I blew out the light so they couldn't see in!"

"Pooh!" began Lloyd, but enough of Gay's excitement had been communicated to both her listeners to make their hearts thump a little faster, when they, too, heard a noise at the window. There certainly were steps on the porch. Then the knocker on the front door was lifted and a hollow clang echoed through the hall.

"Burglars don't knock," said Lloyd with a sigh of relief. "Let's all go to the doah togethah and ask who's there. We needn't open it."

"No, don't!" begged Gay, almost in tears. "It's just like that awful story Kitty started to tell — the knock at the door, the lone woman's voice answering, and the burglar forcing his way over the transom! Our only safety is in keeping perfectly still. If worst comes to worst, *then* I'll make them think there's a man in the house, but I won't do it till I'm driven to it."

"If it's one of the neighbours he'll knock again," said Kitty.

For a moment they waited, their hearts in their mouths, as they remembered what a lonely place was this dark beech woods, and how near it was to Stumptown, with its many drunken negroes.

The knock was not repeated, but the steps sounded as if the intruder were prowling back and forth on the porch. Then the slats of the window-shutters turned stealthily.

"Thank heaven the shades are down!" chattered Gay hysterically. "Oh, girls, I'm growing gray-headed. I can't stand this suspense another second." Then as the steps once more crossed the porch, "Cut up-stairs! Quick! Both of you! I'll follow."

She darted out of the dim circle of light on the hearth, and they could not see what happened, but almost instantly a pistol shot rang out. Up till that moment neither Kitty nor Lloyd had been much alarmed. Now they clutched each other wildly.

"It's some crazy man escaped from the Lakeland asylum," began Kitty, but her words were cut short by another shot, then another and another and another, in such rapid succession that they lost count. A series of piercing screams from Lucy, up-stairs, made their blood run cold, but the shrieks were not half as terrifying as the sight of Gay staggering back out of the hall. As they sprang towards her she leaned against them limply.

"Is she shot?" gasped Kitty in a horrified whisper. "Oh, *where's* the light?"

With shaking hands Lloyd caught up the daily paper, left lying on the settle, and threw it on the coals. It blazed up instantly, and by its light she found the candle.

The shrieks were still going on up-stairs and Betty was calling out frantically to know what was the matter. She could not come down to see for herself, for Lucy had caught her in a hysterical grasp and was holding her like a vise. As the candle flared up something fell from Gay's nerveless hand to the floor. The girls looked at each other in blank astonishment. It was a revolver. Gay herself had fired the shots.

Now in the midst of their bewilderment they became conscious of shouts outside. Some one was calling: "Mrs. Harcourt! Miss Melville! Don't be alarmed! It's only Alex Shelby!"

Recognizing the voice, Lloyd flew to open the door, candle in hand.

"Oh, you gave us such a scare!" she began in a tone of relief. "We thought it was a burglar doing the shooting. We nevah dreamed that *Gay* had a revolvah."

"It was mine," explained Alex, laughing so that

he could hardly close his umbrella. "I loaded it for her and loaned it to her yesterday, but I had no idea it would come back at me in that boomerang fashion. She popped loose and shot at me bang through the front door. The first shot whistled just over my head, and if I hadn't dodged behind a post I surely would have stopped them all. Hottest welcome I ever had."

Then as he came on in, he continued, apologetically, "I'm mighty sorry I gave you all such a fright. I ought to have gone away without knocking when I saw there was no light down-stairs, but I knew you were all here, and it was so early, I never dreamed of being taken for a burglar."

He kept on with his apologies after he came into the hall, but Gay was not there to hear. Mortified that she had been so rash, and horrified by the thought of how serious the consequences of her wild shooting might have been, she could not face him. At the first sound of his voice she ran for the stairs, her wild dash almost upsetting Lucy and Betty on their way down. When repeated callings failed to bring her back, Kitty went up to look for her and found her in a woebegone heap on the foot of her bed.

"Oh, you mustn't take it to heart that way," she

said soothingly, in response to Gay's tearful protests that she could never look him in the face again, never, *never!* That he'd always think what a fool she was and how near she came to killing him.

"Nonsense!" was Kitty's brisk answer. "He insists that it is all his own fault, that he ought to have known what to expect when he called on a native Texan. He says he's always heard that they punctuate their remarks with bullets and will shoot at the drop of a hat. Hereafter he will herald his approach by telephone or else come in a coat of mail warranted to turn even the fire of a Gatling gun. He's making a joke of it, and it's silly of you not to do the same. Get up this minute and come down-stairs, and make him have such a good time that he'll gladly risk another shooting to come again."

It was a long time before Gay could screw her courage to the point of following Kitty meekly down-stairs, and in the meantime Lucy took an effective way to make him forget his inhospitable reception. Her chafing dish was her panacea for many ills. She had tried it at the Post too many times with the different boys who flocked there, not to know its full value. So when Gay came

"HE WAS BENDING ANXIOUSLY OVER A BUBBLING SAUCEPAN."

into the room she found Alex already being initiated into the mysteries of candy-making. With a white apron tied around his waist, and a big spoon in his hand, he was bending anxiously over a bubbling sauce-pan.

Heretofore his calls at the Cabin had been of the most formal kind; but this little escapade was doing more to further their acquaintance and put him on the same privileged footing that the boys at the Post enjoyed, than dozens of casual meetings could have done. It was a novel experience to Alex, and he made the most of it, exerting himself to be entertaining, in hopes of having the occasion repeated.

After the first painful moment of greeting and apology, Gay subsided into a corner of the old settle, but she did not stay there long. It was impossible to resist the infection of Alex's high spirits. When the reaction began it swung her to the farthest extreme, into an irresistible gale of merriment.

Betty's thoughts turned regretfully to the manuscript up-stairs. She was sorry that the reading had been interrupted. She knew the girls would have gained a better impression of the book if they could have heard it without this interruption. There was no telling when there would be an oppor-

tunity to finish it as good as this would have been. Once she had a hope that Alex would not stay long and that there would still be time to finish the reading after his departure. But while the candy cooled Gay started Lloyd and Alex to singing duets, she and Kitty accompanying them with violin and piano, and she knew that it was useless to hope any longer. So she settled down to enjoy the sweets and the music as heartily as the rest of them.

In one of the pauses, while they were searching through a pile of songs for some duet they wanted, Lloyd crossed over to the settle where Lucy was sitting beside the candy, and helped herself to a piece.

"I'm sorry Leland is missing this," said Lucy. "It was a time like this that gave him his nickname of 'Brer Tarrypin.' He used to be devoted to candy-pulls, and came up to the Post every time he thought we were going to have one; and he always was like Brer Tarrypin, you know, in the Uncle Remus stories."

"How is that?" inquired Lloyd, keenly interested. She knew the Uncle Remus stories by heart and wondered in what way this one had been applied to the elegant and fastidious Mr. Harcourt.

"Why, you know, Brer B'ar he helped Miss Meadows bring the wood, Brer Fox he mend the fire, Brer Wolf he kept the dogs off, Brer Rabbit he greased the bottoms of the plates to keep the candy from sticking, but 'Brer Tarrypin he klum up in a cheer an' say he watch an' see dat de 'lasses didn't bile over.' The boys always used to say that the only part in the game Leland would take was *watching the lasses.* He'd talk to their girls while they did the work."

Gay, over at the piano, drew her brows together in a little frown. She wished that Lucy would be more discreet in her reminiscences, for she felt that Lloyd was already prejudiced against Leland more than was desirable. She called out suddenly, "Sister, can't you find that duet for us? You had it last."

Lucy rose obediently, but lingered a moment to add, as Lloyd laughed, "Leland doesn't mind it a bit. The boys all got to hailing him in Uncle Remus fashion, 'Heyo, Brer Tarrypin, wha'r you bin dis long-come-short?' and he'd answer as a matter of course, 'Lounjun roun', Brer Fox, lounjun roun'."

"It's mighty interesting to know the history of a nickname," observed Lloyd, with an amused smile,

which Gay interpreted as meaning that this bit of history was being tucked away for future use.

It was late when Alex went home, taking his revolver with him. He would be staying all night near by, with a friend of his, he told them, and if anything else frightened them they were to telephone. He'd come post-haste to their rescue. Then he made the rounds of all the down-stairs windows and doors, seeing that each was properly fastened, and started Lucy on her way up-stairs with the silver pitcher and ladle safe in her hands. He seemed to leave the sense of his strong protecting presence behind him. As they bolted the door and heard him go whistling cheerily down the road, Lucy declared enthusiastically: "He's a nice boy and he's made us have such a jolly evening that I'm all wound up and don't feel a bit sleepy. Let's make a night of it and hear the rest of Betty's story. It doesn't make any difference if it is nearly midnight. We can sleep as late as we please in the morning, for Jameson isn't here, and we won't have to consider his convenience."

For once they were of the same mind, all loath to go to bed. So Betty slipped into a borrowed kimona, shook down her hair and settled herself comfortably in a cushioned chair beside the lamp.

"If they keep awake to the end," she thought, "that will be a good test. I'll know then that it has real interest and I'll not be afraid to give it to the public." So she kept an anxious watch out of the corner of her eye, intending to stop at the first sign of weariness. But the attention of her audience was as profound as it had been during the afternoon. Stifling an occasional yawn herself, she read on and on. It was half-past two when she laid aside the last page of her manuscript and looked up timidly to receive the verdict. Lloyd spoke first.

"Betty Lewis, it's perfectly splendid! I'm so proud of you — I've always been suah you'd make a name for yoahself some day, but I nevah dreamed you'd do it so early in life, at only twenty!"

"I haven't made it yet, you know," Betty reminded her smiling. "My friends may be willing to 'pass my imperfections by,' but I've still to run the gauntlet of the critics."

There was a chorus of protests from the other girls, and Betty's heart grew warm as she listened to their cordial praise and predictions of success.

"I'm dying to have a finger in the launching of this little bark," said Gay. "Let's wrap it up tonight and have it all ready to send off in the morn-

ing. It would be so fine to be able to brag to my grandchildren that *I* helped. I have a strong flat box just the size of the manuscript. I'm sure it will fit it exactly. Wait and I'll go and get it."

She ran out of the room, and, while she rummaged through a trunk to find it, Lucy climbed up on a chair to look on the wardrobe shelf for some heavy wrapping-paper which she had folded away.

"Let me have some part in it too," cried Kitty. "Although I've no idea what it can be when I'm so far from the source of supplies. Oh, I know now," she said after an instant's thought. "You'll need a string to tie around the box. Here's something that will do."

Opening the wicker satchel she had brought with her she took out a dainty nightgown. It was the work of only a moment to slip out the fresh, new pink ribbons that had been run through the lace beading.

"Now let me tie it!" she insisted. "See what an artistic bow I can make!"

When the manuscript had been placed in Gay's box, tied with Kitty's ribbon and wrapped in Lucy's paper, it was gravely handed over to Lloyd, who had suggested that as it was to be sent by express it ought to be sealed.

"There's a stick of sealing-wax in the drawer of the library table," said Lucy, "if anybody's brave enough to go down and get it at this 'wee sma' hour.' It must be nearly three o'clock."

Before she had finished her sentence Lloyd had lighted a candle to carry down-stairs. She was back in a moment. They all stood around in a circle while she melted the red wax in the heat of the candle. "Somebody ought to say an abracadabra charm ovah it," she suggested. "You do it, Kitty." Then she looked around her helplessly. "What am I going to do for a seal? Quick, somebody, hand me something off the dressing-table. The stoppah of that vinaigrette will do."

Before Lucy could hand her the bottle Gay caught up the old silver ladle and pressed the end of its handle down on the soft wax.

"There's a crest on it," she explained, holding it firmly in place. "The motto will read backwards, but that won't make any difference. There!" She lifted the ladle, and they all crowded around to see the clear-cut impression left in the red wax, of a dagger thrust through a crown. The tiny reversed letters of the motto were undecipherable, but Gay translated them.

"Jameson says it's the Latin for 'I strive till

I overcome,' and that's a fine war-cry for Betty. She's striven so long it's bound to bring a crown, only that other thing ought to be a pen instead of a dagger."

"Let me put one seal on, just for luck," begged Kitty when Lloyd had carefully fastened both ends of the package. She held the wax to the flame. "Everybody make a wish," she ordered. "Wish *hard*."

They wished in silence. In silence they looked on while Kitty dropped the third red drop on the package and pressed into it the crown and the dagger of the ladle's crest. Then they stood over Betty while she addressed it to the publisher to whom long ago she had decided to send it. Then Gay laid it solemnly beside the silver heirlooms as one of the things "to be carried out first in case of fire."

"Three o'clock and all is well," called Kitty as the chime on the stair began its warning. "The deed is done and all the omens are auspicious."

"That will be a scene to remember always," thought Betty gratefully, looking around at the four pretty girls in the candlelight, as they made a ceremony of the launching of her little ship, their faces filled with loving interest.

The chickens were crowing for daylight before she fell asleep, for she could not hinder her happy thoughts from straying off to the future, when this same little ship should come home from sea with its cargo of fame and fortune that the girls had predicted. She had dedicated the book simply "To my Godmother," and she pictured to herself the supreme moment when she could lay the published volume in her hands. She would send one to Madam Chartley, she decided, and one to Miss Chilton, whose instructions in English had been such an inspiration to her. Then, of course, each one of the girls must have one.

Strangers would write to her, people would thrill with pleasure over her pages as she had thrilled over other authors, and — oh, yes! *Davy* must have one of the very first copies of the book, since he had been the first lover of her stories. She almost sat up in bed in the excitement of her next thought. She wondered why it never had occurred to her before. If the book should be really successful it would bring her money of her own. She could be the good fairy of the Cuckoo's Nest. How many comforts she could slip into it to make life easier for poor tired, over-worked cousin Hetty! And — *Davy could go away to school!*

That last thought sent a warm glad tingle over her. How good God had been to give her this delightful way of making a Road of the Loving Heart in every one's memory — with her pen! She felt that her whole life ought to be a perpetual Thanksgiving, and when she fell asleep with a smile on her lips, she was repeating drowsily: "My lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. Yea, I have a goodly heritage."

CHAPTER V

A CAMERA HELPS

Several days after his return from Lexington, Leland Harcourt sauntered out of the house, after a late breakfast alone. The bored expression on his face showed plainly what he thought of the Valley as a summer resort. His brother and Lucy were off somewhere about the grounds, and for more than an hour the faint sound of Gay's violin had been floating up from the rustic arbour, which she claimed as her private domain.

It was a pleasant little retreat, far back from the road in the dense beech shade, and at such a distance from the house that her energetic practising could disturb no one. Here every morning before the distractions of the day began, she religiously devoted an hour to her music. The time always slipped past that limit if no one came to stop her, for an absorbing devotion to her work made her oblivious to everything else when her beloved violin was once tucked under her chin. Scales and trills

and chords, all the finger exercises that kept her touch supple and sure, were gone through with in faithful routine. Then the new music she was mastering had its share of careful attention, and after that she played on and on, as a bird sings, from sheer love of it.

She was improvising when Leland came out on the porch, a light rollicking little tune, to fit a verse from an Uncle Remus song. It was a verse which Alex Shelby had repeated as he escorted them over to The Beeches, the time they spent the night there, the next night after their burglar scare at the Cabin. Lucy had been so frightened that she gladly accepted Mrs. Walton's invitation to stay with her until the men of the family returned.

They had had such a good time. Now the recollection of it was finding voice in the tune which Gay was trying to manufacture for the words which Alex had laughingly sung when Lucy stuck in the barb wire fence on the way over:

"Hop light, ladies, Oh, Miss Loo,
Hit take a heap er scrougin'
Fer to git you throo.
Hop light, ladies, oh, Miss Loo!"

Gay recalled the straggling little procession through the woods with a smile, as her bow qua-

vered again through the refrain. They must have looked ridiculous. There was Lucy lugging the heavy silver pitcher and Jameson's ladle because she was afraid to leave them behind, and she herself with her violin case, and Alex carrying the Lindsey spoons and forks and the enormous seven-branched silver candle-sticks, because Lucy felt responsible for their safety, since she had rented them with the house. And there was Ranald bringing up the rear with their suit-cases, and Kitty laughing at them all for bringing these household gods. She called Lucy "Ephraim joined to his idols," because she would not put down the pitcher and ladle even while she crawled through the barb wire fence. They had cut across lots in the twilight, instead of going around by the road, not wanting to be seen with a load which looked so much like burglar's booty.

"If Leland only could have been with us then!" thought Gay regretfully. "And the night before that when we had such a jolly time with the taffy and the duets. He would have been on a real friendly footing with them all by this time. But he's beginning to find it dull. I know he is. He'll be off again before long if we can't get him interested in something."

While she was worrying over his evident restlessness and discontent, the odour of his cigar came floating out to her, and she knew by that token that he had finished breakfast and needed to be amused. Locking her violin in its case, she carried it back to the house, prepared to shoulder her share of this responsibility.

"Good morning, Brer Tarrypin," she called as she came in sight of him lolling in the hammock. "Lounjoun' roun' as usual, I see. Well, the mail train is in, so you can come with me to the post-office as soon as I get my hat."

"Good heavens, Pug!" he groaned. "I vow you're worse than a little volcano — always in action."

Nevertheless he got up, as she knew he would, and strolled along beside her. The road in front of the post-office was almost blocked with carriages. On summer mornings like this nearly every one in the Valley found some excuse to be at the station when the mail train came in; for while they waited for the delivery window to open, there was time not only to attend to the day's marketing, but to meet all one's friends. At such times the little box of a post-office was the very centre of neighbourhood sociability, and since everybody knew every-

body else, the gathering was as informal as a family reunion.

Even Gay felt like an old settler. Her previous visit to the Valley had given her so many acquaintances. As she passed down the straggling line of men and boys who were leaning against the fence or sitting on the top rail while they waited, hats were swept off as if a sudden breeze had scurried along the path. Several of the old Confederate soldiers spoke her name as they saluted. She had played for them up at the Home twice on that former visit.

"Oh, the dear little, queer little Valley," she began, but was interrupted by Leland's calling her attention to the Sherman carriage, which was moving in and out at a snail's pace through the blockade of vehicles, stopping repeatedly as greetings were called out to it from the other carriages. Gay's face brightened as she saw Lloyd on the back seat, looking as fresh as a snowdrop in her white linen dress.

"Oh, if she'd only ask us up to Locust to spend the morning!" thought Gay so earnestly that it seemed to her that Lloyd must feel the force of the "thought-wave" she was trying to project. "It's

high time for her to remember her promise if she expects to accomplish anything."

Lloyd was remembering her promise. It recurred to her the instant that she caught sight of Leland's dark interesting face as he turned the corner. As instantly she had looked away, remembering how pointedly he had ignored her that night at the Cabin. This was the first time she had seen him since. Now Gay's request seemed utterly absurd. The colour surged up in her face as she remembered her high resolve about lighting a vestal fire on the altar of a promise. How ridiculous of her to have worked herself up into such an exalted mood over nothing. A positive dislike for the man who had been the cause of it took possession of her, and she wished heartily that she need never meet him again.

But an encounter could not be avoided long. Gay was pushing eagerly through the crowd towards the carriage. She would call her in a moment, then she would have to turn around and at least be decently polite. Just then a stylish little runabout stopped opposite the carriage, and a lady leaned out to accost Lloyd. Thankful for the opportunity, Lloyd turned her back squarely on the post-office and plunged into an animated conversation. Without

glancing in their direction she was conscious that Gay and Mr. Harcourt were on the curbstone directly behind her, and would come up the moment that she stopped talking.

"Yes, of co'se, Miss Jennie," they heard her say. "I'm going to town on the next car, and I'll be glad to get it for you. Yes, we're all going in for a day's shopping. Mothah and Betty are ovah at the trolley station now, waiting for me to get the mail."

Miss Jennie, giving voluble directions, began hunting through her pocketbook for a sample of ribbon which she wanted matched. Gay's hopes fell. She had counted confidently on taking Leland up to the Locusts to spend the morning. But just then Lloyd waved her handkerchief to some one coming down the avenue, and turning, Gay's face brightened. It was Kitty Walton to whom Lloyd had waved. Strolling along under a white parasol, in a pale pink dress and with a great bunch of sweet peas in her hand, she looked so attractive, that Gay felt that Leland would find The Beeches fully as entertaining a loafing-place as The Locusts. She decided to take him up there. Again she was doomed to disappointment, for Kitty's cordial greeting was followed by the almost breathless announce-

ment that she was about to take her departure from the Valley.

"Oh, when?" called Lloyd, turning to the girls with the friendliest of smiles, and acknowledging Mr. Harcourt's greeting with a frosty little bow. "When, where and whyfoah?"

"This evening," answered Kitty, "over to the Martinsville Springs in Indiana, and because mother is firmly convinced that they are the panacea for all the ills that flesh is heir to. Really they do help her wonderfully, and she needs the change, and I like the place myself so I'm not sorry to go for some reasons. But I do hate to take ten whole days out of your visit, Gay."

"You can't hate it half as much as I do," answered Gay gloomily, who had not overlooked Lloyd's cool little bow to Leland. For Lloyd to act snippy and Kitty to be away ten whole days right in the beginning of things was fatal to all her plans.

It was just then that help came from a most unexpected source. Not that she realized then that it was help, but weeks afterward she traced back several important things to that small beginning.

Miss Katherine Marks came out of the post-office with a handful of letters. She was about to pass

the group beside the Sherman carriage with only a brief "good morning," when the sight of Kitty's sweet peas made her pause.

"That reminds me, Kitty," she said. "I've finished mounting that garden photograph. You may see it now, whenever you come over."

"I'll come right now, Miss Katherine," was the eager response. "I'm wild to see it, and as we're going to Martinsville this evening this will be my only chance."

Seeing the unspoken wish in Gay's eager eyes, Miss Marks included all of them in the invitation. Lloyd glanced at her watch and excused herself, finding that the car she wanted to take was almost due. She would have to hurry to reach the station she said. But even in her haste she noticed that Leland did not join in the regret which the others expressed, and grown unduly sensitive in regard to his opinion, she fancied that he looked pleased when she refused. He lifted his hat perfunctorily, not even glancing at her as he moved away, seemingly absorbed in adjusting Kitty's parasol, which he had taken possession of, and was holding over her.

Gay walked on with Miss Marks. Kitty had to stop a moment at the Bisbee cottage, to leave the

sweet peas with a message from her mother. Leland waited for her at the gate.

"What is this you're getting me into?" he asked, nodding towards Miss Marks and Gay, who were almost out of sight.

If he had asked the question of Gay she would have explained eagerly that they were on their way to Clovercroft, to see a collection of amateur photographs which had taken prizes and gold medals all over the country, and among them were three at least, that she knew he would want so desperately, that he would fall all over himself trying to get them. But it would be of no use to try. He could neither beg, borrow, buy nor steal them. He might thank his lucky stars that he was permitted just to stand afar off and gaze at them in hopeless admiration.

But Kitty, instead of enlightening him in any such way turned the talk into channels of more personal interest, and made the short stroll so agreeable that it came to an end entirely too soon. He followed her through the gate wishing that he could invent some excuse whereby to prolong the pleasure of making her blush and seeing her dark eyes look up laughingly at him from under the white parasol. At the same time he wanted to escape the bore of

being expected to grow enthusiastic over some amateur collection in which he felt no interest.

Something of this he expressed in an undertone to Kitty as they stepped up on to the porch.

"Don't flatter yourself," she advised him, dropping into a seat, "that you'll be allowed a peep into Miss Katherine's studio. Strangers never get any farther than the Court of the Gentiles."

"Gay has gone in," he answered, "and her introduction antedates mine not more than two seconds. Why shouldn't I?"

"Gay is one of the elect. She has the artist soul herself, and Miss Katherine recognizes the earmarks."

"You insinuate that I haven't them?"

Kitty smiled tantalizingly, and swung her parasol back and forth by its ivory crook. "No, indeed. I'm not insinuating anything. I'm simply stating a broad truth. You can't get in. She'll bring out dozens of pictures for your inspection, but she'll not invite you inside that studio. Very few people are so favoured."

Up to that moment he had not had the faintest wish to set foot inside the studio, but her provoking assertions suddenly seemed to make it the one desirable spot for him to enter. "I'll show you," he de-

clared rashly. "I'll see it before we leave here. I always get what I want. Now watch me."

Miss Marks came out with a large photograph exquisitely tinted. So artistic it was, both in colouring and composition, that Leland's admiration was as great as his surprise. He had expected to see some little snap shots such as he had made himself when he had the kodak fever, the kind that are interesting only to those who take them and those who are taken. This was so beautiful that no sooner was it in his hands than he was fired with a desire to possess it. It was the picture of a rose garden, every bush a glory of bloom, and in the path, her pink dress caught by a clinging brier, was Kitty herself like another rose, looking down over her shoulder at the bramble which held her a prisoner in its thorny clasp.

"It is to illustrate a fairy-tale," explained Miss Marks. "When naughty Esmerelda runs away from the good prince, everything in the garden is in league to help him, and Brier Rose catches at her skirts as she hurries by, and holds her fast."

"Isn't it lovely?" cried Gay, flashing out of the studio with an armful which Miss Marks had given her permission to show. "Here's Betty taken as a nun — *Sister Doloroso* — and Lloyd as an Easter

angel. It's perfectly fascinating to hear Miss Marks tell how she got that effect of flying. Arranged the draperies with Lloyd lying on the floor, and photographed her from a trap door above. Tell him how you added the doves' wings please."

Much to her surprise Miss Marks found herself telling things to this young man that she would not have dreamed of telling to another stranger; some of the remarkable makeshifts she had used in costumes and backgrounds. His flattering air of interest drew these confidences from her as irresistibly as a magnet draws steel.

"You ought to do a series of these garden pictures," he declared, "and call them 'Garden Fancies' after that poem of Browning's. By the way, there is a couplet in that which would lend itself charmingly to illustration, and I saw the very garden that you should use for it, while I was out driving yesterday. It was one of those straight walk prim bordered affairs that go with old English cottages."

He could have found no surer path to Miss Marks's good graces. Gay, not knowing that he had a purpose to gain by it, listened in amazement as he proceeded to outline picture after picture for the series of Garden Fancies, even planning costumes

and suggesting clever means by which various obstacles might be overcome. Her astonishment showed itself in her face, when he even consented to pose himself, as a Spanish troubadour in a moonlit garden with a guitar.

Kitty, who knew the object of this sudden interest in photography, laughed outright, but nobody noticed her irrelevant mirth. Miss Marks was too interested in the new plan, and Gay was too puzzled over his rapidly growing enthusiasm. Presently, darting a triumphant look at Kitty, from the corner of his eye, he rose to follow Miss Marks. She was actually taking him into her inner courts. Kitty made a little grimace behind his back. She resented his I-told-you-so air, but she could not help admiring the masterful way in which he had gained his end.

One hasty glance around the studio changed his assumed interest into real. Impressed by the wonderful results Miss Marks had obtained by the combination of brush and camera, he was seized by a wish to do something in the same line himself. Accustomed to the impulsiveness of his enthusiasms, Gay was not surprised when he began to persuade Miss Marks to start to work on the Garden Fancies then and there.

The English garden was too far away for them to attempt that morning, but Miss Marks finally agreed that the moonlight scene might be managed. It was just the right time of day to take a moonlight picture, while the sunshine was so direct that it would cast the blackest of shadows. She could retouch the plate to give it the right effect, and paint in a moon.

"You'll have to hurry if I'm to be in it," ordered Kitty, "for Mother is waiting for me this blessed minute. I've a world of things to do in the next few hours."

"Give us just a quarter of one of them," begged Leland. "I'll attend to the balcony part if Miss Marks will look after the costumes and tell me where to find a step-ladder."

"Leland has plenty to amuse him now," thought Gay happily, as she watched him giving directions to Frazer, the coloured man, who came in answer to Miss Marks's call. "His foot is on his native heath and his name's 'McGregor' when it comes to a thing of this sort."

Ten minutes later Kitty found herself looking out of an improvised balcony, a charming affair outwardly, but most laughable within. A tall step-ladder had been dragged into the bay window of

the music room, and the upper sash of the middle window pushed down from the top. The thick vines that grew over it were pulled back to leave an oval opening. It was out of this leafy oval she leaned from her seat on the top of the ladder, to smile down on the troubadour below. There was a rose in her dark hair, a half-furled fan in her hand, and a coquettish glance in her laughing black eyes.

Leland's costume had been hastily constructed from scraps of stage property kept for such occasions. It took but a moment to drape a long cape over one shoulder in graceful folds, twist a piece of velvet into a little cap and pin a white plume on one side. A row of potted plants laboriously put in place by Frazer hid the fact that he wore modern trousers instead of the more picturesque knee breeches which such a costume demanded.

"Fire away," he ordered, adjusting the guitar to a more comfortable position.

"Suppose you sing a verse of a real serenade," suggested Miss Marks, "so as to get into the proper spirit of the thing. Then just as you finish, while you're looking soulfully into each other's eyes, I'll squeeze the bulb."

Kitty, seeing the seamy side of his improvised

cap, and feeling the absurdity of her position on the top of the step-ladder, could only giggle when she tried to look soulful. But Leland had taken part in too many private theatricals to be disconcerted now. With as impassioned a gaze as any Romeo ever fixed on his Juliet, he struck the soft chords of a Spanish serenade, and began to sing so meaningly that Kitty's giggle was silenced, and she looked down with a conscious blush:

> "Thine eyes are stars of morning,
> Thy lips are crimson flowers.
> Good night, good night, beloved,
> While I count the weary hours."

"There! That ought to be perfect," cried Miss Marks, emerging from under the black cloth which covered the camera. "Mr. Harcourt, you're the most satisfactory man I've ever had pose for me. It's easy enough to get a score of pretty girls any time I need them, but it isn't once in a decade one finds such an altogether desirable model of a man. You seem to know by intuition exactly the right positions to fall into. I'm sure the series will be a success now."

Leland bowed his appreciation of the compliment, and Gay, knowing his vulnerable spot and how

secretly pleased he was, could have danced a break-down in her delight.

As they were all eager to see the result, Miss Marks took herself at once to the dark room with the plate, promising they should have a proof before time for the Martinsville train. Then Gay and Leland walked home with Kitty, and stayed talking awhile on the shady porch.

"It's been a very decent sort of morning," Leland admitted on his way home to lunch. A siesta in the hammock shortened the afternoon. He was in a most agreeable mood when they drove over to the station to see the Waltons off on their train.

Better than her promise, Miss Marks had sent a finished picture instead of a proof. It was fully as good as the one of Brier Rose and Esmerelda, and Leland was enthusiastic in his admiration of the balcony he had improvised, and the Spanish beauty within it. When it had passed around the circle he coolly took possession of it, although Kitty claimed it, as Frazer had brought it up to The Beeches.

"I'll keep it till your return, Miss Kitty," he said. "You have your mirror, so you don't need this. It may inspire me to run over to the Springs myself

a few days to see the original if you stay away too long."

Something in the light tone made Gay glance up quickly. She groaned as she saw the admiration his expressive eyes showed so plainly.

"Now he's gone and done it!" she thought in dismay. "He's taken a fancy to Kitty instead of Lloyd, when I've set my heart on saving Kitty for Frank Percival. May blessings light on those old Martinsville Springs for taking her out of the way for awhile! Maybe I can get him switched off on the other track before she comes back."

CHAPTER VI

"GARDEN FANCIES"

"Oh, where are you going, my pretty maid?" It was Alex Shelby who called out the question, leaning forward from the doctor's buggy, to look down the locust avenue. Lloyd was coming toward the gate, swinging a hunter's horn back and forth by its green cord. She waved it gaily as she sang in response:

"I'm going a posing, sir, she said."

He turned the wheel and sprang out, asking eagerly, "Is it anywhere that I can take you?"

"No, you're going in exactly the opposite direction, for I'm bound for the spring in the Lindsey woods. Miss Marks asked me to meet her there at eleven o'clock, but her note didn't come until aftah mothah had gone out with the carriage."

Alex glanced at his watch. "If you could wait till I take this case of instruments up to Uncle, I could drive you over as well as not. It would detain

you ten minutes, but even then you'd get to the Spring much sooner than if you were to walk."

"I'll certainly accept yoah offah," exclaimed Lloyd gratefully, looking down the long hot way that lay between her and the Lindsey woods.

"No, I'll not drive ovah to the doctah's with you, thanks. That is such a hot, dusty stretch of road. I'll just sit heah in the shade and wait." Laying the hunter's horn on the stone bench near the gate, she sat down beside it and began to fan herself with her hat.

"What's going on at the spring?" he asked as he climbed back into the buggy.

"I can't tell you. All I know is that old Frazer came up with a note asking me to pose as Olga, the Flax-spinnah's maiden. Miss Marks is always illustrating some old fairy-tale. She wanted me to bring grandfathah's hunting hawn for the prince. I've been wondering evah since who she's found to take that paht."

"Harcourt, I'll bet you anything!" was Alex's emphatic answer as he gathered up the reins. "I saw him over at Clovercroft yesterday morning, setting up a tripod in front of the bay window. Well, here goes. I'll be back in ten minutes."

As Lloyd watched the cloud of dust whirling

along behind the rapidly disappearing buggy, the impulse seized her to call out after him that he needn't come back to take her to the spring, for she was not going. Several times that morning the suspicion had crossed her mind that Miss Marks's new model might prove to be Leland Harcourt, and Alex's emphatic answer seemed to confirm her misgivings. If that were the case she felt that she could not possibly go. He had made such a point of avoiding her that night at the Cabin, that even Betty had noticed it, and she was very sure she didn't want to have her picture taken with a man who had showed his aversion to her so plainly as all that. It would be horribly awkward, she thought, if Miss Marks had asked him to pose with her. He would have to stoop and drink out of her hands as the prince had done out of Olga's. Of course he couldn't refuse, and it would be disagreeable to him and embarrassing to her, knowing as she did how he felt towards her.

It was unlike Lloyd to be sensitive over little things, and to magnify trifles, and she had been unhappy for several days because she had done so in this instance. If she had met Leland Harcourt like any other stranger, she would not have given his manner toward her a second thought; but Gay's

plea beforehand in his behalf made her self-conscious. Of course he couldn't possibly know that she had lain awake, looking at the stars, picturing herself as a sort of guardian angel, who should lead him to great heights of achievement (as Gay had assured her she could do). But she felt that he must have divined her intentions toward him, and was secretly amused at her presumption. Her face burned every time she thought of the regal manner in which she had swept into the room, trying to make her entrance impressive, and then the polite way in which he had handed her over to some one else as if she were a mere child to whom he must be civil, but whose school-girl prattle bored him.

"I can't *beah* him!" she said in a disgusted tone to a black ant, which was crawling along towards the stone bench where she sat. But the little ant, intent on its own affairs, hurried past her as unheedingly as if she had been part of the bench.

"And I suppose my opinion is of no moah impawtance to him than it is to you," she added, with a shrug of the shoulders. Then she laughed, for the comparison suddenly seemed to put the affair in a different light.

"I'm certainly glad you happened along this way, Mistah Ant," she said, bending over to stop him

with a stick while she made her whimsical speech. "Because I'm going to profit by yoah example from now on. Heah me? I'm going to quit worrying over what people may think of me and go along about my business just as you are doing. *You* nevah think about yoahself, do you! You don't even know that you *have* a self, so of co'se you can't feel slighted and sensitive."

Lifting the stick so that the little creature might go on its eager way again, she watched it disappear, and then began idly tracing figures in the dust at her feet.

"I wish I had an enchanted necklace like Olga's," she mused, recalling the old fairy-tale for which she was soon to pose. "Not one that could give me gorgeous dresses whenevah I repeated the charm, but one that would sawt of clothe my mind — put me into such a beautifully serene mental state that I wouldn't mind slights, and would be as unconscious of self as that little old ant."

Then a surprised, pleased expression lighted her face, as a sudden recollection seemed to illuminate the old fairy-tale, and give it a new meaning.

"Why, it's like that lovely verse in the Psalms that Miss Allison read to the King's Daughters, the first time I went to a meeting of the Circle.

'The King's Daughter is all glorious within. Her clothing is of wrought gold.'" Sentences from Miss Allison's earnest little talk of long ago began coming back to Lloyd like fragments of forgotten music. Something about being anointed with the "oil of gladness" and wearing garments that smelled of myrrh and aloes and cassia "out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad."

Now in the story when Olga would change her gown of tow to one befitting her royal station, she had only to clasp a bead of her magic rosary and whisper:

> **"For love's sweet sake, in my hour of need,**
> **Blossom and deck me, little seed,"**

and straightway she would be clad in a garment, fine and fair as the shimmer of moonbeams. And Lloyd, casting about in her mind for a like charm that would make her "all glorious within" as Olga's made her glorious without, suddenly bethought herself of her little necklace of Roman pearls. She had not taken it back to school with her in her Senior year, for she felt that she had outgrown its childish symbolism. She could "keep tryst" with life's obligations now without the visible reminder of a little white bead, slipped daily over a silken

cord. Still, it had helped her to remember, so many times in the past, that she was strongly tempted to try the efficacy of her little talisman just once more. Glancing at her watch, she saw that Alex had been gone only five minutes. Then dropping the stick with which she had been writing in the dust, she ran lightly up the avenue, into the house and up to her room.

"Maybe it is sawt of childish," she thought as she opened the sandal-wood box and clasped the rosary around her neck. "But I don't care, if it will only help me to remembah not to be snippy and sensitive and to go about my business like that little black ant. It's funny how such a little thing started me on the right path."

When Alex came back she met him with such a shining face that he glanced at her curiously. "You look as if you had heard good news," he said as he helped her into the buggy. "What's happened?"

"Oh, nothing," she laughed. "I've just been practising my paht while I waited for you. I'm the Princess Olga, and I've gotten rid of my gown of tow, and I'm so relieved to find the real King's-daughtah attire, that I'm as happy as a June-bug."

He did not understand her allusion, but it would have made no difference if she had talked to him in

Greek, with that charming dimple coming and going as she laughed. It was a pleasure just to sit and watch her, while she rattled on in her inimitable way about June-bugs, wondering how happy they were anyhow, and why people chose them as the unit of measurement when they were measuring joy.

Over at the spring while they waited for Lloyd to come, Miss Marks and Leland Harcourt experimented at picture-making with Gay for a victim. Stretched out on the rocks of the creek bank, with her hands lying in the shallow water and her hair streaming over her shoulders, she was obligingly trying to obey instructions to "look as wet and dead as possible."

Lloyd and Alex, coming on her unexpectedly as they picked their way up the ravine, having tied the horse where the woodland road ended, were horrified to find her lying there so limp and still. But the next instant Leland's voice sounded somewhere up among the bushes: "That's great, Pug. Try to keep the pose a little longer till we get one more plate. With a sea-gull and some rolling waves painted in in the background, it will be a perfect copy of that painting I saw in Brittany."

"Well, hurry, please!" called Gay plaintively.

"I can't stand it much longer. The sun on my wet face is burning it to a blister, and the rocks are cutting my elbow, and I know it's a spider that's crawling over the back of my neck."

Lloyd gave a toot of the hunter's horn to warn them of their approach and the extra plate was never made. For with a little shriek the "Drowned Fishermaiden" scrambled up from the rocks in embarrassed haste, and when she caught sight of Alex, fled away into the bushes to gather up her dishevelled hair and otherwise put herself to rights. She was too agitated to notice Lloyd's meeting with Leland, but while she made herself presentable the sound of laughter floated in among the bushes to her most reassuringly.

"They're laughing at me," she thought, "but I don't care how ridiculous I looked. *Anything to* break the ice between them and put them on a friendly footing."

At the sight of Leland's dark face with its cynical, slightly amused expression, Lloyd's resentment returned, but the touch of the little necklace recalled her resolve. "I'll *not* be snippy and sensitive," she repeated to herself, clasping one of the beads in her fingers as if it really held some potent charm to help her change her mental attitude.

So when Gay joined them she found that Lloyd had dropped her distant, disdainful manner of the day before and was her own sweet, winsome self It was with a sigh of relief that Gay left them to the discussion of poses and costumes, and turned to Alex, who was about to take his departure. The one word, picnic, was enough to stop him. It was what he had been hoping for ever since the Harcourts had taken the Cabin. Gay's appeal for help set him to work with the zest of a truant school-boy.

While he made a fire and carried water from the spring, Gay emptied the baskets they had brought, and spread the contents out on a great flat rock. Then while the water boiled for the coffee, and the potatoes were roasting in the ashes, she sent him to look for a wild grape-vine.

"I want a lot of grape-leaves to make into little baskets to serve the berries in," she told him. "And bring them up here where I can keep an eye on what is going on at the spring. There seems to be a hitch in the performance somewhere."

The difficulty was with the prince's costume. Nothing they had brought gave quite the effect they wanted, so finally Leland proposed bringing the story down to date.

"The modern Princess is the Summer Girl," he

said. "So take Miss Sherman just as she is, and I'll go back to the Cabin and put on a bicycle suit."

"They are getting on famously," thought Gay as she listened to Lloyd's merry response to something he called back, as he went crashing away through the bushes. The last little basket was made and filled with berries before Leland came back, dragging his wheel up the ravine. Gay and Alex, having finished their preparations, climbed up the bank to watch the pretty tableau, Lloyd making a cup of her white hands and catching the water in them, that the prince might stoop and drink.

"Let's try it again, Miss Marks," cried Leland enthusiastically. "How is this pose?" He dropped gracefully to one knee, baring his head as he bowed it over Lloyd's hands.

"Is the change in him or is it in me?" thought Lloyd as the dark eager face smiled up at her, with its quick flashing smile that she found so peculiarly attractive. "He certainly is the most entahtaining man I evah talked to."

"The show is over," called Gay as Miss Marks began to put up her camera. "If your royal highnesses will deign to descend, dinner will be served immediately." It was an attractive table she led them to, the red berries shining in luscious heaps in

"MAKING A CUP OF HER WHITE HANDS."

their little green baskets, mounds of fresh watercress beside every plate, and a big bouquet of wildflowers in the centre of the rock table.

"What is the peculiar charm of a picnic?" queried Alex as he fished an ant out of the sugar and opened a half-cooked potato.

"At home one would send such a dish back to the kitchen in red-hot wrath. Here one eats it in a sort of solemn joy."

"It's the spell of the June woods," suggested Miss Marks.

"No, it's youth in the blood," said Leland. "All the Junes in the world and all outdoors wouldn't make a half-baked potato fit for the gods unless one has 'the sun and the wind in his pulses.'"

"No," insisted Gay. "It can't be that, for Jameson isn't much older than you, and he despises prowling around in the woods, as he calls it. He made so much fun of it that Lucy went driving with him instead of coming with us, and she adores such outings, just as much now as she did before she was married."

"Maybe no one feels the charm unless the gods have given him a sort of Midas touch that will turn everything disagreeable, like ants and underdone potatoes, into golden experiences," said Alex. "The

Midas imagination let us call it. And the way to keep it in good working order is to give it constant practice. Let's have a picnic every day."

"To-morrow," announced Leland, "I'll take you all over to that old English garden that I discovered, to take that Garden fancy of Browning's we were discussing."

Gay looked up quickly. It had been understood only yesterday that they were to wait for Kitty's return for that picture. His taking it for granted that Lloyd would assume the part augured well for her hopes.

"You know that poem of Browning's, don't you, Miss Sherman?" he asked, smiling across at her.

Now Lloyd had never cared for Browning. In fact she frankly admitted that she had never got far enough into many of his poems to know what he was talking about. At Warwick Hall Miss Chilton had been such an enthusiastic interpreter of his that ten of the girls in Lloyd's class had formed a Browning club. Although she declined their invitation to join them, she was more complimented by that invitation than any other of that school term, and envied them their apparent enjoyment of what to her was a tangle of vague meanings. Now when she saw Leland take a well worn copy from his

pocket and flip over the leaves to find the place, with an ease that showed long familiarity with it, she wished that she had joined the club. It made her feel childish and immature to think that she could not discuss this subject with him as any one of those ten girls could have done. But it was one of the simple poems to which the book opened. From her seat opposite, Lloyd could see the marked margins and underscored lines, as he read aloud:

"'Here is the garden she walked across
Arm in my arm such a short while since.
. . . . . .
Down this side of the gravel walk
She went, while her robe's edge brushed the box.
And here she paused in her gracious talk
To point me a moth on the milk-white phlox.'"

"Oh, I can just *see* that picture," cried Miss Marks enthusiastically. "I wish we had time to take it to-day."

"But wait, here's a better one," he added, turning the page.

"'This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,
Stooped over in doubt, as settling its claim,
Till she gave me with pride to make no slip,
Its soft, meandering Spanish name.
What a name! Was it love or praise?
Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?

I must learn Spanish one of these days
Only for that slow, sweet name's sake.'"

Lloyd picked up the book open at the place where he laid it, face downward, on the rock.

"I wondah what flowah Browning meant," she said, "that had such a 'soft, meandering Spanish name. Speech half-asleep or song half-awake —' It must have been something exquisitely beautiful or he wouldn't have been willing to learn a language just for the sake of knowing that one name."

Farther down the page were other underscored lines. She read them softly, almost under her breath.

"'Where I find her not, beauties vanish.
Whither I follow her beauties flee.
Is there no method to tell her in Spanish
June is twice June since she's breathed it with me?'"

"Isn't that sweet?" cried Gay. "Say it for us, Leland. Say it in Spanish so we can hear how it sounds."

With an indulgent smile, as if amused at her childishness, he lazily did Gay's bidding, then as she began exclaiming over the musical syllables to Alex, he turned to Lloyd and repeated the line with an emphasis which made it altogether personal. Of

course she could not understand it, but the words were like bird-notes, and there was no mistaking the language of those dark expressive eyes that held hers a moment in their admiring gaze. They said as plainly as if they had spoken aloud, "June is twice June, since *you've* breathed it with me."

Lloyd felt the colour surge up into her face, and to hide it, turned quickly and began examining a grass stain on the hem of her skirt, with apparent concern. But an exultant little thrill flashed over her. He liked her. She was sure of it, and it made her glad, so glad that it amazed her to think that only two hours before she had confided emphatically to a little black ant crawling over her path, that she couldn't bear him.

When she had finished a critical examination of the grass stain she glanced back again, hoping that Gay had not seen her embarrassment. To her relief Gay's entire attention was absorbed in an argument with Alex as to the exact meaning of the quotation, whether twice June meant a lengthening of the calendar or an intensifying of its pleasures. Miss Marks, like a good chaperone, could not have noticed, for she was busy gathering up the dishes, and Lloyd sprang up to help her.

Presently, as they started away from the spring,

Leland came around to Lloyd's side. "You must let me teach you Spanish, Miss Sherman," he said in his masterful way which seemed to leave her no choice in the matter. "An hour a day wouldn't take much of your time, and would be enough to give you some idea of the charm of the language. Gay tells me you play the harp. Some of the songs are exquisite."

"Oh, I nevah in the world could learn it, I am suah!" she answered lightly, with a shrug that seemed to indicate the uselessness of undertaking such a task.

"You don't know," he answered authoritatively. "You've never had me for a teacher."

Again that flashing look that made his eyes deepen so wonderfully and curved the cynical lips into an altogether gentle and winning smile. It seemed to photograph itself on Lloyd's memory, recurring to her again and again in the most unexpected moments. She saw it on the way home with Alex, all the time she was laughingly recounting some of her Warwick Hall escapades. It came between her and her book when she tried to read herself to sleep that afternoon, and the last thing that night when her eyes were closed and the lights

were out she saw again that glance that said as plainly as the slow music of his Spanish words, "June is *twice* June since *you've* breathed it with me."

CHAPTER VII

SPANISH LESSONS

THE Harcourt carriage swung rapidly along the road, for the Little Colonel held the reins, and was testing the speed of the new horses, just sent down from Lexington.

"Isn't it glorious?" she cried, with a quick glance over her shoulder at Gay and Miss Marks on the back seat. "It's like flying, the way they take us through the air, and they're the best matched team in the country."

Leland, on the seat beside her, watched with growing admiration her expert handling of the horses, and Gay watched him. Swathed in a white chiffon veil, she was paying the penalty for being so obliging the day before. She had lain so long on the rocks in her pose of the drowned fisher-maiden, that her face was burned to a blister, and she could not touch it without groaning. But she would willingly go through the ordeal again, she

told herself, in order to bring about the present desirable state of affairs.

"Now which way?" asked Lloyd as they came to a turn. "I feel like a Columbus on an unsailed sea. I thought I knew every gah'den around heah within a radius of five miles, but I've nevah seen any that fits the description of the one you're taking us to."

"Turn to the right," Leland directed. "Then it's just a short way down a woodland road. You'll come to an old-fashioned wicket gate and a straight, box-bordered walk leading up to the back of such a quaint vine-covered old house with a red door, that you'll expect to see a thatched roof and hear an English skylark."

"Well, of all things," laughed Lloyd, "why didn't you say little red doah in the first place. That would have located it for me. You've simply discovahed the back premises of old Doctah Shelby's place, and yoah wondahful English gah'den is their kitchen gah'den. We could have reached their front gate in ten minutes from our house, and heah you have led us all around Robin Hood's bahn to find it. That loop around Rollington took us a good two miles out of the way."

"Well, that's the only way I knew how to reach

it," he answered, with the flashing smile she had learned to look for. "I hope that you don't feel that it has been time wasted. *I* don't."

"Not behind hawses like these," she answered. "We'll forgive you for the sake of the ride. I nevah get tiahed of driving when I can go this fast."

She turned into a narrow lane leading around to the front of the house, and waited for Leland to open the gate.

"How natural everything looks," she exclaimed. "I haven't been heah for yeahs, and when I was a little thing of six or seven I used to be a weekly visitah. I'd bring my dawg Fritz, and stay from breakfast till bedtime. I called Doctah Shelby 'Mistah-*my*-doctah' and his wife 'Aunt Alicia,'" she went on as Leland resumed his seat in the carriage. "They said that I reminded them of their only daughtah, who was dead, and they used to borrow me by the day. They spoiled me so that it was perfectly scandalous the way I acted some times."

"Why did you stop coming?" asked Gay.

"Mrs. Shelby had a fall that made an invalid of her, and she has been away at sanitariums and hospitals most of the time since. I've seen her often,

of co'se, but not heah. It's only lately that they've opened up the house and come home to live."

Places exercised a strong influence over Lloyd. Just as she felt the challenge of the locust-trees in the avenue at home, and could not pass those old family sentinels without an unconscious lifting of the head and that pride of bearing which they seemed to expect from all the Lloyds, so this old homestead had its peculiar effect upon her. As she went up the path she had the same feeling of absolute sovereignty that she had had a dozen years before when her slightest wish was law in this adoring household, and where every act of hers, no matter how outbreaking, passed unchided. If she chose to empty the sugar into the middle of the garden walk and fill the bowl with pebbles, "Aunt Alicia" took her afternoon tea unsweetened, rather than ring for more, and thus call Mom Beck's attention to the naughtiness of her little charge.

Once, some babyish whim prompting her to order every picture turned to the wall, the doctor meekly obeyed, and when some chance caller remonstrated, he protested that it was a very small thing to do to give a child pleasure, and that there was no reason why she shouldn't have them upside down if she wished. So strong was the old spell now, that as

she stepped up on the porch and saw the same ugly little Chinese idol sitting against the front door to prop it open, that had sat there on all her former visits, she stooped and stood it on its head.

"Why on earth did you do that?" gasped Gay.

"Simply fo'ce of habit," laughed Lloyd. "I used to hate it so because it was such an ugly old thing that I always stood it on its head to punish it for staring at me. I did it this time without thinking."

Leland laughed. Never in the short time he had known her had she seemed quite so adorable as she did at this moment, relapsing into the childish imperiousness of her Little Colonel ways. While they waited for Mrs. Shelby to come down he watched her going around the room, renewing her acquaintance with all the old objects that had once held a fascination for her. She called his attention to the tapestry on the wall, a shepherd and shepherdess beside a trellis on which hung roses as big as cabbages, and told him the quaint fancies she had once had about the romantic figures. The stuffed birds under the glass case on the mantel each had a name she had given it. She remembered them all, from the yellow canary, to the mite of a humming-bird, poised at the top.

Stopping before a queer old whatnot, filled with bric-à-brac and shells, she caught up a round china box. A gilt eagle, hovering over a nest of little eaglets formed the lid, and her face began to dimple as she lifted the china bird by its imposing beak.

"There ought to be peppahmints inside," she said. "There always used to be, because I'd howl if there wasn't, and they couldn't beah to have me disappointed. Well, I wish you'd look! Deah old Aunt Alicia! She's remembahed all these yeahs and kept it ready for me."

She held the box out towards him, and he saw that it had been freshly filled with delectable little striped drops.

"It hurts my conscience," she said, looking up wistfully, as the familiar odour of the peppermint greeted her, "to think how I have neglected her. Heah I have been going to picnics and pahties and all sawts of things evah since I came home from school, and have nevah been neah her. I'm going to find her this minute, and not wait for her to come down as if I were some strangah."

The quaintly furnished old room straightway lost its charm for Leland when she left it, but Gay, pushing aside her veil to taste the contents of the eagle's nest, which Lloyd had deposited in her lap,

scrutinized everything with interest. This was Alex's home now, and she wondered how he would look in the midst of such surroundings. She couldn't imagine him with such an antiquated background. Miss Marks picked up a basket of daguerreotypes from the marble-topped table, and began examining them.

They could hear Lloyd calling at the top of the stairs, "Aunt Alicia," and then Mrs. Shelby's voice, tremulous with pleased surprise: "Why it's the Little Colonel! Oh, my dear! My *dear!* what a joy it is to have you here again!" Then they heard Lloyd laughingly explaining their mission, and after that they seemed to pass into another room, for a low hum of voices was all that could be distinguished.

Presently Mrs. Shelby came down alone. She was a gentle little old lady, with faded blue eyes, and a sweet patient face. She wore a bunch of gray curls over each ear in the fashion of her girlhood. There was a lingering charm of youth about her, just as there was a faint suggestion of lavender still clinging to the fine old lace that fell over her little hands. Almost as soon as she had finished welcoming them an old coloured man followed her into the room, bearing a huge tray with tinkling

glasses, a decanter of raspberry shrub, and a plate of little nut-cakes. While he served the guests she explained Lloyd's delay with almost girlish eagerness.

"I have taken a great liberty with your model, Miss Marks, but Lloyd assured me you would be perfectly willing. This last day of June is a very happy anniversary of mine and the doctor's. I have been thinking of it all morning, and when Lloyd came up the stairs just now, so glowing and bright, it seemed to me I saw my own lost youth rising up before me, and I asked her to put on a gown I have treasured many years, and be photographed in that.

"It is the one I had on when Richard proposed to me," she explained, a faint pink tingeing her soft old cheeks. "Fifty years ago to-day, in that same old garden. This was my grandmother's place then. Richard bought it afterwards. And a year from to-day if we live, we will keep our golden wedding. If you can use the gown in the photograph it will make me very happy, for it is falling to pieces, despite my care of it. Lloyd thought it very picturesque and appropriate."

While Miss Marks was expressing her delight over the privilege, for the unearthing of old costumes was one of her pet diversions, Lloyd came

down the stairs and stopped shyly in the doorway. She had tucked up her shining hair with a tall ivory comb, and it hung in soft curls on each side of her glowing face, in the old fashion of Mrs. Shelby's girlhood. The thin, clinging dress enveloped her like a pale blue cloud, and a flat, wide-brimmed garden hat swung from her arm by its blue ribbons. With the donning of the ancient dress she seemed to have put on the sweet shy manner that had been the charm of its first wearer.

A long-drawn "oh!" of admiration from Gay and Miss Marks greeted her appearance, and she turned a timid glance towards Leland, who had risen quickly. His glance and his silence were more eloquent than their words, for she turned away blushing.

"Now if I may have a bit of paper to make a moth to pin on the milk-white phlox," began Miss Marks, but Mrs. Shelby stopped her eagerly.

"Oh, my dear, we will have the picture perfect in every way. Richard has a case of butterflies and moths in his office. I shall send a servant to bring it and to call him over, for he will want to see Lloyd in that gown I am sure. How I wish Alex were here to be photographed with her. He is so broad

shouldered and erect he reminds me daily of what his uncle was at his age."

"Maybe he will come before we are through," suggested Miss Marks. At the mere thought of his coming, Gay pulled her veil down hastily over her blistered face. Behind its protecting screen she watched the old couple keenly, when the doctor arrived. They had eyes for nothing but Lloyd, and their gaze followed her tenderly wherever she went.

"They're just *daffy* about her," thought Gay. "It's plain to be seen they'd give anything in the world to get her into the family. I hope Doctor Alex won't come in time to be photographed with her. If he'd never fallen in love with her before he'd have to do it now. He couldn't help himself when she looks like that, and then where would all my plans be for poor Leland?"

But Leland was taking care of his own interests. As soon as Miss Marks had taken enough plates to satisfy herself he led Lloyd off to the end of the garden to show her a flower which he had found with a soft meandering Spanish name.

"We'll begin the lessons to-morrow," he said, as if it were all settled. The masterfulness of his tone had pleased her the day before, but here in the place where she had done all the dictating and others

had obeyed, it aroused a feeling that Mom Beck would have labelled "the Lloyd stubbo'ness." She didn't want to consent, simply because he had taken it for granted that she would, so she laughingly contradicted him.

"We'll begin to-morrow," he repeated, smiling down at her so insistently that she dropped her eyes before his. Then to her surprise she found that her opposition had completely vanished. She felt that it would be one of the pleasantest pastimes that could be devised, to study such a musical language under such a teacher. But she had no intention of letting him know how she felt about it for a long while, so she was thankful for the interruption which came just then.

Miss Marks, who was exploring the rest of the premises in search of further possibilities, sent Gay to summon her to the front of the house.

"She says to 'come into the garden, Maud.' She is going to add a Tennysonian pose to her series of Fancies, and she's found a place where there's a bit of terrace for you to come tripping down, à la Maud, to the tune of 'She is coming, my own, my sweet!'"

Catching up her long filmy blue skirt, Lloyd hurried away, leaving Gay and Leland to follow as they

chose. Leland finished the verse in a clear tenor voice as if singing to himself, but it followed Lloyd down the walk as if meant for her alone:

> "'She is coming, my own, my sweet!
> Were it ever so airy a tread
> My heart would hear her and beat
> Though 'twere earth in an earthy bed.
> Would start and tremble under her feet
> And blossom in purple and red.'"

Then he hummed it almost under his breath, the entire verse again, forgetful of Gay at his elbow until she spoke.

"Wouldn't Kitty have looked adorable in that darling old hat tied under her chin? It's too bad she couldn't have been here to pose as Maud."

"Oh, I don't know," he answered absently. "She's too dark for the part. Miss Lloyd looks it to perfection."

Gay's eyes shone delightedly behind the white veil, and for a few steps she could not help skipping, as she blessed the Martinsville Springs, which had taken Kitty off in the nick of time to save her for a different fate. By the time Maud's picture was taken Alex arrived, and Miss Marks was promptly seized with an inspiration.

"I am going to have two pictures of *Darby*

and Joan," she exclaimed, "to add to the series. Alex, you take Lloyd down into the garden again beside the phlox, and turn so that I'll get your profile. It is so like your uncle's. I'll call that one '*Hand in hand when our life was May.*' Then I'll take Mrs. Shelby and the doctor in exactly the same position as a companion piece, and call that '*Hand in hand when our hair is gray.*'"

They made a joke of it, the two old people, and obligingly took the places that Lloyd and Alex left, but a mist sprang to Lloyd's eyes a moment later, watching the devoted old couple who for fifty years had been lovers and for forty-nine years had been wed. Marriage like that seemed a beautiful thing; she wondered if such an experience would ever be hers. She wished Mammy Easter had found a better fortune for her than the one she told over her tea-cup.

It was noon by the time the pictures were all taken, and Leland took Miss Marks home in the carriage while Lloyd went up-stairs to change her dress. She wanted Gay and Leland to stop at The Locusts for lunch, but Gay refused because she couldn't go to the table in a veil and under the circumstances she couldn't go without one. She got out of the carriage, however, and sat on the porch

while Leland took the old Colonel for a short spin down the road, to try the new horses.

"It's been a mighty nice morning," she said. "I wish Lucy could have been with us. She adores discovering old places like that and doing unexpected things. It almost spoiled my good times thinking of the wistful way she looked after us when we drove off."

"But she's married!" exclaimed Lloyd. "I shouldn't think she'd care for those things in quite the same way as she did before. I should think she'd rather stay with her husband."

"Bosh!" said Gay. "Being married doesn't change a person's disposition and make tame old hens out of lively little humming-birds. That's just what Lucy was, a dear little humming-bird, always in a flutter of doing and going; and you needn't tell me that she enjoys poking there at home with nobody but Jameson, as much as she would enjoy going out with us and doing things."

"But he's her husband!" insisted Lloyd, as if that term covered all that could be desired of human companionship. Then she hummed meaningly:

> **"'Hand in hand when our life was May,**
> **Hand in hand when our hair is gray!'"**

Gay shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Oh, that Darby and Joan business is all right when your hair *is* gray, but Lucy is only a year older than I am, and Jameson doesn't interest himself in a single thing that she likes. He's devoted to her, so devoted he doesn't want her out of his sight; but it's the kind of devotion that has taught me a lesson. If ever I tie myself up that way it will not be while life is May. I'll have a good time first."

Lloyd had no answer for such heresy. She was going over in her mind the list of people from whom she had unconsciously taken her exalted impressions of married life: her mother and Papa Jack, the old Colonel and Amanthis, Doctor Shelby and Aunt Alicia, Rob's father and mother. She felt that Gay was mistaken. To be sure there were old Mr. and Mrs. Apwall, who quarrelled like cats and dogs, but somehow even they had given her the impression that they enjoyed their little encounters, and quarrelled to pass the time, rather than because they bore each other any ill-will. Then she reflected that these were all people of an older generation than Lucy, and maybe there was a difference in the times. Surely Gay must have good reason for speaking so feelingly. This was not the first time that she had spoken of Lucy with tears in her

eyes, and when she did that, Lloyd, recalling Mammy Easter's tea-cups, was vaguely glad that it had been foretold that hers would be empty.

The old Colonel came back in a few minutes loud in his praise of the new horses, and to Lloyd's surprise, in high good humour with their owner. Evidently Leland had improved his opportunity and had exerted himself to make friends with the old Colonel, for to Lloyd's amazement he cordially insisted on Leland's considering The Locusts a second home as long as he should be in the Valley, and to come at any hour he chose. The latch-string would be out for him.

"I shall certainly avail myself of the privilege very soon," he responded, "for to-morrow I have the honour to begin giving Miss Lloyd lessons in Spanish. So few young ladies nowadays play the harp, that when one has the ability she owes it to the world to learn the Spanish songs. Don't you think so?"

Lloyd opened her mouth to protest that she had not yet given her consent, but closed it again as the old Colonel began expressing his pleasure at such an arrangement. She felt trapped. It was to please him that she had learned to play on her grandmother's harp. Any reference to it always put him

in a gentle humour. She wanted him to be cordial and friendly with Leland, and was glad that he was no longer prejudiced against him, so she held her peace; but it exasperated her to have her consent taken for granted in such a high-handed way. He had ridden over her objection as regardlessly as if she had never made any.

She had boasted to herself, "He needn't put on any of his lordly ways with *me!*" and here she was submitting meekly, without a word. It worried her after they had driven away. All the time she was up in her room, getting ready for lunch, she kept thinking about it.

"I'll just give him to undahstand that it was on grandfathah's account," she decided finally. "Instead of my influencing him as Gay expected, it looks as if *he* were winding *me* around his fingah. But he isn't! He sha'n't! I'll take the lessons, but I'll have no foolishness about it. I'll surprise him by sticking strictly to business, and I'll set him a good example of the way to live up to his own family motto."

Mrs. Sherman, who made no objection to the lessons since the old Colonel approved of them so heartily, was on the front porch with her embroidery when Leland came up the next morning, the

first of July, to give the first lesson. She smiled to see how energetically Lloyd threw herself into it, thinking it was a matter of pride with her to show him what rapid progress she could make.

It certainly was a matter of pride with the Colonel, who enjoyed being waylaid to hear how beautifully she could count to one hundred or name the months of the year. It became his habit to take the book, while, perched on the arm of his chair, she rattled off the vocabulary for the day's lesson, and reviewed all the others.

"That's right! That's right!" he would say encouragingly. "At this rate you'll soon be ready for a trip to the Alhambra, and I'm blessed if I don't take you some of these days. I've always wanted to go."

When Kitty came home from the springs Lloyd insisted on her joining the class, but she declared she was too far behind to attempt catching up. Besides she was in charge of affairs at home now, and Elise was to have a house-party soon. There were half a dozen good reasons why she could not take the time. The principal one, which she did not give however, was that it was plain to be seen that Leland was more interested in studying Lloyd than in teaching her a language, and under such

circumstances, Kitty preferred not to make the third party.

So while Kitty's mornings were filled with her housekeeping duties, Betty's with her writing and Gay's with her music and plans to keep Lucy occupied, it gradually came about that Leland spent more and more of his time at The Locusts. The lessons lasted only an hour, but after that he usually found some excuse to stay: there was a new song that he wanted to hear, or a game of tennis, or a stroll down to the post-office. Sometimes when he had no excuse at all he lingered anyhow, lounging on the shady porch, and talking of anything that happened to come uppermost. Then at night he was often there again, either because The Locusts was the gathering place of the Clan, and a frolic was afoot, or he went to escort Lloyd and Betty to the Cabin or The Beeches to some entertainment the other girls had planned.

"My oh! What a buttahfly I'm getting to be!" laughed Lloyd one evening as she went into her mother's room to have her dress buttoned. "A hawse-back ride this mawning, a picnic this aftahnoon, and now the rustic dance in the Mallards' barn to-night. But nevah mind, little mothah," she added with a hug, as she caught a wistful look on

Mrs. Sherman's face. "It'll all be ovah soon. This is the last summah of my teens. When I am old and twenty I'll nevah leave yoah side. 'I'll sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam' and take all the housekeeping cares off yoah shouldahs as a dutiful daughtah should."

Mrs. Sherman gave her shoulder a caressing pat as she fastened the last button. "I'm glad to have you go, dear," she answered, "especially to all the out-door merry-makings. They keep you young and well. Papa Jack and I will walk over after awhile and look on."

"The Mallard barn dances are always so much fun," said Lloyd, lingering to give a final touch to her mother's toilet. "Wait! Yoah side combs are in too high, and yoah collah isn't pinned straight in the back. How did you evah manage to dress yoahself right befoah I grew up to tend to you?"

As she made the changes with all a young girl's particularity about trifles, she went on, "That last one they had three yeahs ago was lovely. Will you evah forget the way Rob cake-walked with Mrs. Bisbee? It makes me laugh to this day, whenevah I think of it."

"I suppose Rob will hardly be there to-night," said Mrs. Sherman, smiling as she recalled the

ridiculous appearance he had made. His cake-walk had been the feature of the evening.

"No, indeed," answered Lloyd. "He's no moah likely to be there than the man in the moon. I wish he would though. He used to be the life of everything. We saw him this evening as we drove home from the picnic. He had just come out from town, and he looked so hot and dusty and ti'ahed it made me feel bad. He's like a strangah now, didn't stop to speak, only lifted his hat and turned in at the gate at Oaklea, as if he hadn't gone on a thousand drives with us. He ought to have been interested in what we were doing for old times' sake."

Lloyd had not thought of Rob for days, but she was reminded of him many times that evening, the affair at the Mallards' barn was so much like the one to which he had taken her three years before. The same old negro fiddlers furnished the music. The same flickering lantern light made weird shadows on the rough walls, and the same sweet smell of new hay filled the place. As the music of the Virginia reel began she thought of the way Rob had romped through it that other time, and wished she could see him once more as jolly and care-free as he was then.

"Why can one nevah have two good times ex-

actly alike?" she wondered wistfully. She was standing near the wide double doors, looking out across the fields as she thought about it later, recalling how many things were alike on the two occasions, even the colour of the dress she wore. She remembered that because Rob had said she looked like an apple-blossom, and it was rare indeed for him to make such complimentary speeches. It wasn't best for girls to hear nice things about themselves often, he said. It made them hard to get along with, too uppity.

The music stopped and Leland Harcourt came to find her. She was looking so pensively past the gay scene that he bent over her, humming in a low tone:

"'What's this dull town to me?
Robin Adair?
What was 't I wished to see?
What wished to hear?'"

She started with a little laugh, blushing slightly because he seemed to have read her thoughts. "Robin Adair" was one of Mrs. Moore's old names for Rob, and she *had* been wishing for him.

Over at Oaklea, Rob sat scowling at a book spread out before him on the library table He was thinking of Harcourt as he had seen him on the front

seat beside Lloyd, in his cool-looking white flannels, the very embodiment of gentlemanly leisure. No doubt she noticed the contrast between them, he all dusty and dishevelled from his day's work and the trip home on the hot car. Not that he would change places, not that he regretted for an instant the part he had to take in the grimy working world. But the chance encounter had suddenly opened his eyes to all that he had had to sacrifice for that work. Until now it had not even left him time to realize how much he had given up. Now to find this stranger enjoying all that was once his, stung him to envy. He smiled grimly as he recognized it as envy. He had thought himself free from such a childish trait. But he could not smile away the feeling. It persisted till it accomplished more than the old Judge's advice and his mother's pleadings, that all work and no play was bad for him. Closing his book he announced his intention of walking over to The Locusts.

As he went up the avenue he heard the distant scraping of fiddles and the rhythmic beating of feet in the Mallard barn. He had forgotten that it was the night of the rustic dance.

He was disappointed at finding no one at home but the old Colonel. But his welcome was so cordial

that he stayed even longer than he had intended. The Colonel always had the latest news of every one, but to-night he had to talk first of the wonderful progress Lloyd was making in Spanish, and what a fine fellow that young Harcourt was.

"Didn't like the chap at all at first," he confided. "Thought he was too much of a confounded foreigner; but I'm a big enough man I hope to acknowledge a mistake, and I own up I was prejudiced."

When Rob finally rose to start home, the Colonel would not let him go until he had promised to come again the next night, when Lloyd and Betty should be at home. Afterwards he regretted having made the promise. Although he went early Harcourt was already there, seemingly as much at home as if he were a member of the family. It made Rob feel like a stranger to see this newcomer usurping the place that he had always filled in the Sherman household.

It grated on him also to hear Lloyd saying, "Si, señor" and "gracias" when she addressed Harcourt, and grated still more for Harcourt to turn to her as he did continually with some aside in Spanish. Never more than a phrase or a word, and "just for practice," they laughingly explained,

but it seemed to emphasize a tie that had drawn them together, and — Rob's remoteness.

He left early. Walking slowly down the avenue he thought of the hundreds of times he had passed under those old locust-trees on sweet starlighted summer nights like this. What a goodly company of old friends they were! The kind that never change. He looked up, vaguely grateful for the soft lisping of leaves above him. They seemed to understand why he was going, why he could not stay.

Half-way down the avenue he heard the tinkle of Lloyd's harp, and then her voice beginning to sing. The seat beside the measuring tree was just ahead and he made his way to it, quietly, on tip-toe almost, that he might lose no note. But it was an unknown tongue she was singing, a song that Harcourt had taught her, and Rob could not understand a word. It was so symbolical of the change that had come between them that a fierce impulse seized him to rush back to the house and throw the interloper out of the window. Then he smiled bitterly at his own vehemence. What right had he to be so savage over her friendship? He was her big brother only, and even that merely in name, because she had chosen to call him so in

those years that they had been such loyal good chums. It was little and mean and selfish of him to begrudge her the slightest thing that would give her pleasure. This man with his fortune, his accomplishments, his rare social gifts had everything to offer, while he, — he had not even *time* to put at her disposal. Time to find bypaths to happiness for her —

The sweet clear voice sang on, the old locusts rustled softly as the night wind stirred them. Then the song stopped, and for a long time he sat staring ahead of him with unseeing eyes. At last he rose, and taking a step towards the tree beside the bench, passed his hand over the bark, groping for the notches he knew were there but could not see.

He paused at the one a little higher than his shoulder, and then his fingers found the four leaf clover he had carved beside it, the last time Lloyd had stood up to be measured. He could almost see her standing there again like Elaine, the lily-maid, fair-haired and smiling while he repeated the charm of the four leaf clover:

"'Love be true to her —
Joy draw near to her —
Fortune find what your
Gifts can do for her —'"

He had forgotten how the lines went but it made no difference. Anyhow they voiced what had always been his dearest wish for her, and standing there in the dark he vowed savagely that any man who stood in the way of the old charm's coming true, should have him to reckon with.

When he swung off down the path, taking the short cut to Oaklea, his hat was pulled grimly down over his eyes, and his mouth was set in a firm hard line. He did not open his books again that night. Lying on the couch by his open window, he watched the lights at The Locusts shining through the trees, till the last one went out, and he knew that Harcourt had gone.

CHAPTER VIII

"SHADOWS OF THE WORLD APPEAR"

THE long July days slipped by, and Lloyd, looking back on them as Hildegarde looked into her magic glass, saw only pleasant scenes mirrored in their memory. The fortunate things, the smiling faces, the pleasant happenings were hers, and for a time even other people's troubles, those shadows of the world that are always with us, left her daily outlook undimmed.

Like Hildegarde, too, she went on with her weaving, but wholly unconscious that the shuttle of her thoughts was shaping her web to fit the shoulders of the dark-eyed knight who came oftenest. Mrs. Sherman saw it and was troubled.

"Jack," she said to her husband one afternoon, when he had come out from town earlier than usual, and they were wandering around the shady grounds together, planning some improvements, "I'm afraid those Spanish lessons are a mistake.

Lloyd is seeing entirely too much of Mr. Harcourt. He is here morning, noon and night."

Mr. Sherman gave a quick glance towards the tennis court where the two were finishing a lively game. "Don't you worry, Elizabeth," was his placid answer. "It isn't as if she'd never been used to such devotion. She's never known anything else. Malcolm and Keith used to spend fully as much time with her, and Rob Moore fairly lived over here."

"Yes, but this is different," protested Mrs. Sherman. "They were mere boys, and she dominated them, but Leland Harcourt is a man, and an experienced one socially, and he is dominating her. I can see it in her quick deference to his opinions, and her evident desire to please him. Not evident to him, perhaps, but plain enough to me. I've been thinking that it might be a good thing for us to go to the springs for awhile or to the sea-shore or some place where she'd meet other people. In a quiet little country place like this a man like Leland Harcourt looms up big on a young girl's horizon; a girl just out of school, eager for new interests. It isn't wise in us to allow her to be restricted just to his society, when we could so easily give her the safe-guard of contrasts."

Mr. Sherman looked down at his wife with an indulgent smile.

"Don't you worry," he repeated. "Lloyd will do a lot of romantic day-dreaming probably, but she has my 'yard-stick' and I have her promise."

"But Jack, I verily believe the child thinks he measures up to all your requirements. And really there is nothing one can urge against his character. It's more a matter of temperament. I am sure she couldn't be happy with him. She's just at the romantic age now to be very much impressed with that kind of a man. If she were older she would see his shallowness — his lack of purpose, his intense selfishness. I don't think that we ought to shut our eyes to the possible outcome of this constant companionship we are allowing."

"Well," he answered hesitatingly, slow to acknowledge his wife's distrust of Lloyd's judgment, yet quick to see the wisdom of her point of view. "Maybe you are right. But," he added wistfully, "I had hoped to keep her home this summer. She has been away at school so long — and she'll be in town so much next winter if she makes her début. Wait till I have had a talk with her before you plan any trips."

"But don't you see," urged Mrs. Sherman, "it

is something too intangible to discuss. To speak to her about it now, to make any opposition to him at all, may quicken her interest in him and make her champion his cause. That would be fatal, and yet it's just as dangerous to wait. Love at that age is like a fog. It comes creeping up so gradually that you don't realize what is enveloping you, till you're completely lost in it, and all the rest of the world shut out."

"You speak from experience?" he said teasingly.

"You know very well," she confessed laughingly, "what a befogged state I was in. All papa's breathing out of 'threatening and slaughter' didn't make the slightest difference. I was blind and deaf to everything but you. And I'd want Lloyd to be the same," she added hastily, "if you were as unreasonable as papa was then. But the circumstances are too different to be compared. I'm simply warning you that the Little Colonel's name was not lightly given. She has not only my determination in her makeup, but her grandfather's as well."

Here the gardener met them, and the conversation dropped. The next half hour was spent in consultation over some changes to be made in the conservatory.

When they went back to the house Leland Harcourt had gone, and Lloyd was just stepping into Doctor Shelby's buggy, which was drawn up in front of the house. The old doctor waited for them to come within hearing distance before he leaned out and called:

"I'm just borrowing the Little Colonel for awhile. There's a case over at Rollington that needs the attention of her King's Daughters Circle, and I'm taking her over to investigate it. We'll be home before dark."

"All right," called Mr. Sherman, waving his hat as Lloyd looked back at them with a smile and a flutter of her handkerchief. During the winter that Lloyd had joined the Circle, and in the summer vacations following, it had been a matter of frequent occurrence for the old doctor to take her with him on such errands. Remembering how interested Lloyd had become in many of the cases, Mrs. Sherman breathed a sigh of thankfulness, hoping that this might prove to be one that would enlist her sympathies and occupy so much of her time that it would make a serious break in the Spanish lessons.

It had been a happy afternoon for Lloyd. If she had stopped and tried to recall what made it so.

she could not have mentioned any particular thing. To be young and well and filled with the same glow that made the summer day a joy was enough, but to feel that some one whose opinion she valued very much found her charming, and said so with every glance of his dark eyes, was more than enough. It made her cup of happiness complete and brimmed it over.

The doctor was pouring out a tale of somebody's woes, but the trace of a smile lingered on her lips as she made a polite attempt to listen. She could not quite shut out the thought of that last game of tennis, and the trivial pleasantries that had gone to make up the sum of her great content. There was a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes as she listened. The Spanish serenade that Leland Harcourt had sung before he left kept repeating itself over and over, a sort of undercurrent to what the doctor was saying. She beat time to it with her finger-tips on the side of the buggy. Once it rose so insistently that she lost what the doctor was saying, and came to herself with a start when a familiar name arrested her attention.

"Ned Bannon's wife!" she repeated in astonishment. "You suahly can't mean that it's Ida Shane

who's sick ovah in that tumbledown cottage of the McCarty's!"

"I surely do," he answered. "She didn't want to come back to this part of the country, goodness knows. She remembers what a commotion it raised when she eloped from the Seminary with Ned, five years ago. But Ned has scarcely drawn a sober breath for the last year. She's sure of getting needlework here, and with little Wardo to consider there was nothing for her to do but put her pride in her pocket and come."

"Little Wardo!" breathed Lloyd wonderingly. The ride seemed full of surprises.

"Yes, she has a little son about four years old, I judge. And it is on his account that I have asked the help of the King's Daughters. He'll have to be taken away from her till she's better, for she is morbidly sensitive about keeping Ned's failings from him. She has never allowed him to find out that his father is a drunkard. She makes a hero of him to the little fellow. Seems to think that he'll blame her for giving him such a father by marrying a man whom she had been warned would bring her nothing but trouble and disgrace. She's desperately ill, and of course in her weak

condition she magnifies the matter. It has become a mania with her."

"Poah Violet!" exclaimed Lloyd in distress, her thoughts flying back to the scene in the school orchard five years ago, when watching the glimmer of the pearl on Ida's white hand in the moonlight she had been thrilled by her whisper: "He says that's what my life means to him — a pearl; and that my influence can make him the man I want him to be. Oh, Princess! I'd give my life to keep him straight!"

Not even an echo of the serenade was in her memory now. Her knowledge of Ida's nearness seemed to bring her old school-friend actually before her: the faint odour of violets, the shy glance of her appealing violet eyes under the long lashes, the bewitching dimple at the corner of her mouth, the flash of her rings, the sweep of her long skirts, the soft hair gleaming under the big-plumed picture hat, more than all the air of romance and mystery that surrounded her because of the pearl and the secret engagement to her "Edwardo."

"I hadn't intended for her to see you," said the doctor, when her exclamations and questions revealed to him the intimacy that had once existed between them. "But under the circumstances it

will be the best thing I can do. I'll go in first and prepare her for the meeting, however. She thinks she hasn't a friend left on earth, on account of her unhappy marriage. Everybody warned her against it."

The front door stood open, and Lloyd sat down on the broken step to wait. It seemed impossible that she was going to find Ida, the embodiment of daintiness and refinement, in this dilapidated old place. The whitewash had long ago dropped in scales from the rough walls. The window-panes were broken, the shutters sagging, half the pickets off the fence. Not a spear of grass ventured up in the barren yard, where a rank unpruned peach-tree struggled for its life in the baked earth. The house stood so near the road that the thick summer dust rolled in suffocatingly whenever a vehicle passed.

"How can people exist in such an awful desolate, forsaken spot?" she wondered, looking around with a shudder of disgust. That Ida, dainty beauty-loving Ida, who scorned everything that was common and coarse, should be lying inside in that dark room was more than she could believe.

A wagon rattled by, and she put her handkerchief up to her face, stifled by the cloud of dust

that rose in its wake. When she ventured to take it down again and draw a long breath, a chubby, barefooted child was standing in the path in front of her, regarding her curiously. The wagon made so much noise that she had not heard his bare feet pattering around the house. She gave a little start of surprise, then smiled at him, for he was an attractive little fellow, despite the fact that his face was smeared with the remains of the bread and jam he had just been enjoying at one of the neighbours, and his gingham apron was in rags. He had caught it on the barb wire fence as he climbed through.

As he smiled back at her shyly from under his long lashes, Lloyd's interest quickened, for there was no mistaking the likeness of those violet eyes and the dimple that came at the corner of his cupid's bow of a mouth. They were so like Ida's that she smiled and said confidently, "You're Wardo. Aren't you!"

He nodded gravely, then after another long silent scrutiny, turned away to pour the sand out of the old tin can he was carrying, in a pile under the peach-tree. If it had not been for the jam and the dirt Lloyd would have caught him up and kissed him, he was such a dear little thing, with a

thatch of short golden curls. But her fastidious dislike of touching anything dirty made her draw back. It was well for the furtherance of their acquaintance that she did so. He was not accustomed to caresses from strangers. He accepted her presence on the door-step without question, and presently, as the moments passed and she made no movement towards him, he went up to her with friendly curiosity.

"Is you got a sand-pile to your house?" he asked.

"No," she confessed, feeling that he would consider her lacking on that account and that she must hasten to mention other attractions. "But I have a red and green bird that can talk, and a little black pony named 'Tarbaby.' It's so little that there's nobody at my house now small enough to ride it. So it stays all day long in the field and eats grass."

"I'm little enough to ride it," he began confidently.

Just then the doctor came out, and she sprang up, her heart throbbing. "I'm going now for the nurse," he said in a low tone. "She's due on the next train. Keep her as quiet as possible. Of course you'll have to let her free her mind, but

promise her almost anything to soothe her. I'll be back in quarter of an hour."

Frightened at being left alone with such a weight of responsibility thrust upon her, Lloyd tiptoed into the house. In the dim light she almost stumbled over the cot on which Ned Bannon lay in a drunken stupor, and her first glance at the bed beyond made her draw back in dismay. She never would have recognized the white face on the pillow as Ida's, had it not been for the appealing eyes turned towards her.

Five years of poverty and illness and neglect had changed the pretty little school-girl into a faded, care-worn woman. She had been crying ever since she was taken sick, and now was so weak and hysterical that she caught at Lloyd with a cry, and clung to her sobbing.

"Oh, it kills me to have you find me this way!" she gasped, "when I've tried so long to hide what we've come to. But I'm glad you've come, for the baby's sake! Oh, Lloyd, what's going to become of my little Wardo!"

It was several minutes before she could talk coherently, and then she began to sob out the story of her married life, her miserable failure to reform Ned. Lloyd tried to stop her presently, thinking

she was becoming delirious, but she might as well have tried to stop a high tide.

"Oh, I have been so proud!" she sobbed. "I couldn't tell anybody. I couldn't tell you now if I wasn't afraid that I might die, like that poor woman across the street last night. She's left five little children. But I can't leave my little Wardo like that!" she broke out desperately. "I *know* he has inherited Ned's awful appetite. I must stay and help him fight it, *for it's all my fault. I* gave him such a father. A father that he can never be proud of! A father that will be only a disgrace to him! Oh, why didn't somebody warn me that it was not only a husband I was choosing but my little Wardo's father! Nobody ever told me *that,* and I was so young I never thought of any one but myself. And now the poor little innocent soul will have to suffer for it all his life long!"

She was throwing herself about so wildly that Lloyd was frightened, and rose from her chair to call one of the neighbours. But she could not break away. Ida caught at her dress and held her fast in her frenzied clasp.

"But I tell you I won't let him grow up to be like that!" she cried with her eyes glaring wildly at the drunken man on the cot across the room.

"I'll kill him with my own hands first, while he is little and good. God would understand, wouldn't he? He couldn't blame me for trying to save my baby! But if he did I'd have to do it anyway. I'd have to do it and take the punishment. I can't have my little Wardo grow up to be like *that.*"

The sound of his name brought the child to the door. He came pattering in, and climbing up on the bed beside his mother, stroked her face with his dirty little dimpled hand. The soft touch quieted Ida in an instant, and with an effort to speak calmly she looked up at Lloyd.

"The doctor said the baby must go away for awhile, for fear of the fever. But I can't give him up to just anybody, Lloyd. The neighbours have been good and kind, but I'm afraid he might find out from some of the children about Ned — you know. But with you — Oh, Lloyd, would it be asking too much if —"

She stopped with her question half uttered, but the imploring look in her eyes was a prayer that Lloyd could not resist, and she held out her arms toward the little figure cuddled up on the bed.

"I'll take him till you're better," she promised impulsively.

The tears welled up in Ida's eyes again. She was so weak the least thing started them.

"He's never been away from me a single night in his life," she said brokenly. "I couldn't give him up to anybody but you." Then seeing the frightened look that crept into the child's face as he listened to the conversation which he but half understood, she wiped her eyes and smiled at him tremulously.

"Dear little son, you want to help mother get well, don't you, lamb? Then go with mother's dearest friend for awhile. She'll take care of you while the good doctor makes me well. And she'll tell you stories and make you have such a happy time."

"And let you ride on the black pony," broke in Lloyd eagerly, anxious to clear away the troubled pucker on the child's face that came at mention of a separation.

"An' hear the wed and gween bird talk!" he added himself, his face lighting up at the thought. Then he laid his plump little hand on Ida's hot cheek to compel her attention. It was a gesture she loved, and she kissed his fingers passionately as he said with an eager voice, "She has a bird

that can talk, muv'ah. I'll go and hear what it says an' n'en I'll come back an' tell you."

Evidently his idea of separation was based on the length of the neighbourhood visits he had made, and he accepted Lloyd's invitation willingly, expecting a speedy return.

"Let's go wite away, Dea'st Fwend," he exclaimed, wriggling down off the bed. "I'll get my hat."

If anything had been needed to complete Lloyd's surrender to the little fellow's charms, it was the sweet way in which he gave her the title "Dearest Friend." That was what his mother had called her, and he thought it was her name. She caught him up and kissed him, despite the jam streaks and the dirt.

"Come on and have yoah face washed and yoah curls brushed, so we'll be all ready when the buggy comes back," she said, hurrying to make him presentable before his mood could change.

As she gathered his clothes together and packed them for the short journey in a dress box which she found under the bed, it made an ache grip her throat to see how Ida had thrown the shield of her mother-love around him in every way possible. There was no mark of poverty here. She

had cut up her own clothes, relics of a happier time, to make the little linen suits that were so pretty and becoming. No child in the Valley was better clad, or looked so much like a little aristocrat, as long as she was able to give him her daily attention.

He was so accustomed to being washed and brushed and dressed that he made no objection to what most children of that age consider an unnecessary process, and when Lloyd went about it with unpractised fingers, he gravely corrected her mistakes, and laughed when she made a play of the buttonholes being hungry mouths, that swallowed the buttons in a hurry. Never in her life had she exerted herself so much to be entertaining, for she wanted to take him away without a scene. She wanted, too, for him to look his best, that he might win his own way at The Locusts. She thought with a trifle of uneasiness that her impulsive act might not meet her family's entire approval.

Ida's separation from him was a painful one, for she realized her condition, and knew that it was possible that this might be her last sight of him. As Lloyd turned away with her parting cry ringing in her ears, "Oh, be good to him! Be good to him!" a great tenderness sprang up in her heart for the child who put his hand in hers so trustingly,

and trotted away beside her obediently at his mother's bidding. At the cot he stopped to clamber up and kiss the red face, burrowed down in the pillows in a sodden sleep. "My poor farvah's sick too," he explained looking up at her, as if bespeaking sympathy for him also.

Once in the buggy, while they waited for the doctor to unfasten the hitch-rein, he reached up and put his hand on her cheek in his baby fashion to ask her a question. The touch brought the tears to her eyes, it was so confiding, and she was still so shaken by the scene she had just witnessed. In a great throb of tenderness for the helpless little body given over to her care, she drew him closer, with a hasty kiss on the top of his curly head.

"Dea'st Fwend," he said, smiling up at her as if he understood the reason of her sudden caress. Then he cuddled his head against her shoulder in a satisfied way, saying, "Tell me again what the wed and gween bird says."

As they drove in at the entrance gate to The Locusts, Lloyd recalled an experience she had not thought of in years; an autumn day, when only a baby herself, not yet six, she had been left to make her way alone up this same avenue. She had never spent a night away from her mother, and she was

to stay a week alone with her grandfather, who did not know how to sing her to sleep and kiss her eyelids down so she wouldn't be afraid of the black shadows in the corners. Here by this very gate she had stood, assailed by such a great ache of loneliness and homesickness that she was sure she would die if she had to endure it another moment. And there was the spot where, rustling around in the dead leaves, Fritz had found the little gray glove her mother had dropped when she stooped to kiss her good-bye.

As she remembered how she had carried that glove, all week, rolled up in a little wad in her pocket, to help her to be good and not to cry, she resolved that Wardo should not have the same experience if any effort of hers could prevent it. She would devote her time to him night and day and keep him so happily employed, there would be no time for "the sorry feelin's" that had been her childish undoing. There was no care or accustomed tenderness he should miss.

It was nearly dark when she reached home, and so afraid was she that the nightfall itself would make Wardo homesick, that she began to provide for his entertainment even before she made any explanation to her astonished family.

"Oh, Papa Jack," she called. "Please find the parrot right away for Wardo to see, then I'll explain everything."

For once the red and green bird was on its good behaviour, and began to show off as soon as it was brought to the front. While Wardo watched it, wide-eyed and absorbed, Lloyd gave an excited and tearful account of her visit to Ida. The old Colonel said something about the fever and the danger of infection, but when she had finished her story nobody else had the heart to show displeasure at what she had done.

"And I won't let him be a trouble to anybody!" she added. "I'll take care of him every bit myself, and keep him out of the way."

As Mrs. Sherman watched her leading the child up-stairs, talking to him at every step to keep his thoughts diverted from home, and then heard her giving orders to Walker about her old high chair and little white crib to be brought down from the attic, she turned to Mr. Sherman with a sigh of relief.

"She's found her own antidote for the Spanish lessons, Jack. We won't have to go away to the springs or the mountains now, I'm sure."

"FOR ONCE THE RED AND GREEN BIRD WAS ON ITS GOOD BEHAVIOUR."

CHAPTER IX

MORE SHADOWS

From that first night, Wardo had the entire household at his feet. Lloyd scarcely touched her own dinner in her anxiety to anticipate his wants. He was very near tears sometimes, when his furtive glances around the table showed only strange faces, but he was "a game little chap" as the Colonel said, and "a credit to whoever had taught him his manners."

He could not be induced to speak save in whispers, when Lloyd put a protecting arm around the high chair where he sat, and with an indulgent smile leaned over with her ear almost touching his lips. Before the dinner was over he fell asleep, worn out by the unusual excitement of the day, his curly head laid confidingly on "Dea'st Fwend's" shoulder.

"Sh!" whispered Lloyd warningly to the coloured man who came in to change the plates for

dessert. "Wait a minute." Carry him up-stairs first, please, Papa Jack. If I can get him undressed without waking him he'll miss one homesick crying spell anyhow."

Leland Harcourt came just as she had accomplished the task, and Betty tiptoed into the room to tell her. Lloyd looked down at the little white-gowned figure in the crib, and shook her head as it stirred restlessly. "I'll stay with him," offered Betty.

"No, I must wait till I'm suah he's sound asleep. You explain to Mistah Harcourt, please, and I'll come down aftah awhile. Oh, Betty! Isn't he a darling? It's going to be moah fun taking care of him than dressing dolls used to be!"

It wasn't so much fun next morning, however, when he cried to be taken to his mother. Every sob that shook the little shoulders tore Lloyd's heart also, for remembering the violence of her own childish grieving, she put herself into Wardo's place so completely that she cried too. Then everybody in the house rose to the occasion. Papa Jack brought out Tarbaby, and walked him up and down the avenue as long as Wardo was pleased to sit in the saddle. Mrs. Sherman took him to the stables to see half a dozen gray kittens that had

made their home in the hay, and Walker carried him pick-a-back to look at the calves.

After that the old Colonel unsheathed his sword and got out his spurs, and started to tell the bloodiest battle tales he knew, and when they did not meet with the approval he expected, he actually invented a game of bear, which they played in his den. They played it till Wardo began shrieking with thrills of real fear at the fearsome growling and the big fur gloves thrust at him from behind the leather couch. He grew so nervous and excited that the Colonel was at a loss to know how to calm the whirlwind he had unintentionally stirred up.

It was Betty who came to the rescue. She led him down to the orchard, and taking him on her lap in the old swing, swung him so high up into the top of the apple-tree that they could look over and see the eggs in a blue-bird's nest. Then little by little she stopped their swinging, till presently they were swaying very gently back and forth near the ground, and she had charmed him into quietness with one of the old tales that she used to tell Davy, about the elves who live in the buttercups and ride far miles on the bumblebees.

Glancing up towards the house, she saw Leland Harcourt mounting the steps. It was the hour for

Lloyd's lesson. So although she had intended to spend the morning outlining a magazine story which she had in mind, she took a fresh grip on the swing rope, and began another tale.

That was the way Wardo's entertainment went on for the next few days. He was not allowed an idle moment in which to think of going home. So what with all these amusements and the novelty of constant attention from his elders, it was not long before he developed into a veritable little tyrant, demanding attention every moment of his waking hours. But when her unremitting service grew irksome Lloyd had only to think of Ida, tossing helpless and delirious at the mercy of the wasting fever. Her daily visits to the cottage kept her in full realization of the seriousness of the case, and a deeper feeling of tenderness swept over her whenever she came back to Wardo after one of these visits, for each time she knew that the dreaded crisis was nearer, and she could not bear to think of his being left motherless.

"It will just kill him!" she thought with tears in her eyes, as she watched the pitiful quivering of his mouth and the manly attempt to choke back his sobs, whenever Ida's name was mentioned. So to make sure that he was happily employed she took

him wherever she went, except on that one short drive which she made daily to Rollington. When she and Betty spent the day at The Beeches or the Cabin, he was one of the party. When Miss Marks had another expedition to finish her Garden Fancies, he was included in the group, and a charming picture he made, as with a butterfly net in his hand, he stooped to point to the figures on the old sun-dial, that marked the flight of the happy summer.

It was from this expedition that they drove back one evening in the early August twilight. He had been asleep most of the way home, but roused up as the carriage turned in at the gate. Betty, leaning forward in her seat, drew a long breath.

"Oh, smell the lilies!" she exclaimed, looking across the lawn to where they stood, like tall white ghosts in the twilight. "How heavenly sweet! Such a delicious ending to such a nice day. Do you know, Lloyd, I've been feeling all the way home as if I were going to hear from my book to-night. The publishers have had plenty of time to read it since I sent it. I feel it in my bones that there'll be a letter waiting for me."

"*How* do you feel fings wif your bones, Betty?" asked Wardo, sleepily raising his curly head from Lloyd's shoulder.

"Oh, I couldn't make you understand," she answered. "It's just a sort of happy flutter all through you that tells you something nice is going to happen."

"What's flutter?" asked the tireless questioner, but Betty paid no heed. The carriage had reached the steps, and with a spring she was out, calling eagerly as she stepped into the broad path of light streaming across the porch from the hall door, "Any mail for me, godmother?"

"Nothing but a package," answered Mrs. Sherman, coming out to meet them. "And it will keep. Better run on in and eat your dinner first. Cindy has been keeping it hot for you all."

But Betty could not wait. As she darted into the hall Mrs. Sherman turned to Lloyd, who was half dragging, half lifting the sleepy Wardo up the steps.

"Poor little girl," she said in a low tone. "I wanted to put off her disappointment as long as possible, and not spoil her happy day with such an ending. Her manuscript has come back from the publishers."

"Oh, mothah!" exclaimed Lloyd in distress. "You don't mean that they've refused it! They suahly couldn't have done *that!* Maybe they've

just sent it back for her to make some changes in it."

Betty's voice in the door stopped her. As long as she lived, Lloyd never again smelled the odour of August lilies when they were heavy with dew, that she did not see the tragic misery of Betty's white face as it appeared that moment in the light of the hall lamp.

"They've sent it back, godmother," she said in a low even tone. "It wasn't good enough. It's all a miserable mistake to think that I can write, for I put the very best of myself into this and it is a failure."

"No! No!" began Lloyd, but Betty would not wait for any attempted comfort. "I don't want any dinner," she said, then with her mouth twitching piteously as she fought back the tears, she ran upstairs, and they heard the door close and the key turn in the lock.

Nobody ever knew what went on behind that locked door, for Betty was as quiet in her griefs as she was in her joy and made no audible moan. She threw herself across the foot of the bed and lay there staring out of the window in the hopelessness of utter defeat. The katydids shrilling in the Locusts seemed to fill the night with an unbearable

discord. She put her hands over her ears to shut out the hateful sound. It seemed to her that nothing mattered any more. As she slowly recalled all her months of painstaking work, the keen pleasure that each hour of it had afforded her was turned into bitterness by the thought that it had proved a failure.

Only once before had she felt such hopelessness. That was at the first house-party, when she thought she was doomed to be blind. They had brought her the newspaper containing her first published poem. It was called "Night," and as they guided her finger over the page that it might rest proudly on the place where her name was printed, she had faltered, "It's going to be such a long night, and there are no stars in this one!"

Now the outlook seemed even more hopeless, bereft of the star of her great hope. The ambition to be an author had been a part of her so long, that it seemed even more indispensable than her eyesight.

The slow hot tears began to drop down on her pillow after awhile, tears of mortification as well as disappointment. The girls would have to know. She had been foolish to make such a parade of her attempt. She should have waited. But then she

had been so *sure* that her story was a good one. That was the hardest part to bear, that she had been so mistaken. It would have been easier, she thought bitterly, if her rebuffs had come earlier; if some of her first contributions had been returned. But the way had been made so easy for her. Her very first poems had been accepted, printed, praised. Everybody had predicted success, everybody expected great things of her, even old Bishop Chartley. The girls at school had openly proclaimed her as a genius, the teachers had praised every effort and urged her to greater, the whole Valley looked upon her as one set apart by a special gift.

Was it any wonder, she asked herself, that she had come to believe in her own ability. It was as if she had been urged down a flowery path by each one she met, to find that every guide was mistaken, and that the way they pointed out ended in a dismal slough of disappointment.

Presently she heard Wardo's little feet on the stairs, pattering up to bed, and his voice raised in his ceaseless questioning; then a little later Lloyd's voice singing him to sleep. After that there was the sound below of people coming and going, Leland Harcourt's laugh and the scrape of wheels on the gravelled drive.

She felt a dull throb of gratitude that the family left her alone.

A long time after she heard the closing and locking of doors, and then steps again on the stairs. Some one stopped outside her door.

"Good-night, Betty deah."

"Good-night," she answered in a voice which she tried to keep steady, but there was a sob in it, and divining that the kindest thing would be not to notice it, Lloyd choked back the word of sympathy she longed to speak, and went on to her room.

Nearly an hour after Betty got up, and lighting her lamp, sat down at the desk where the rejected manuscript lay. Turning it over listlessly, she read a paragraph here and there, trying to see it through the eyes of the publisher who had returned it. If he had sent merely a printed notice of refusal, such as she had been told was customary, stating impersonally that it was returned with regret because unavailable, she would have started it off again at daybreak to another place, knowing that what does not fill the special need of one firm may be seized with alacrity by another. But this man had taken the trouble to explain why it was unavailable.

Now, in the light of that explanation, she wondered with burning cheeks how she could have

thought for one instant that it was good. She could see, herself, that it was crude and childish and ineffectual; not the style in which it was written. Betty was sure of her ability there. She was as conscious that her diction and composition measured up to the best standards, as an athlete is conscious of his strength. It was her view-point of life that had amused the great publisher. He hadn't ridiculed it in words, but she felt his covert smile at her schoolgirl attempt to deal with the world's big problems, and the knowledge that he had been amused cut her like a knife.

Pushing the package aside, she took out the last volume of her diary, and from force of habit made an entry, the record of the return of her manuscript. "It has come back to me, the little bark that the girls launched so gaily, with ceremony and good wishes. It has come back a shipwreck! It was almost easier to face blindness than it is to face this failure. How can I give up this hope that has grown with my growth till it means more than everything else in the world to me? How can I live all the rest of my life without it? Somehow for years I have felt that the Lord wanted me to write. The feeling was like the King's call to Edryn, and I have gone on answering it as he did:

"'Oh list!
Thou heart and hand of mine, keep tryst,
Keep tryst or die!'

"Of course it would be folly for me to go on now, when it has been proved beyond all doubt that I am not able to keep the great tryst worthily, and yet — life seems so empty with this one high hope and purpose taken out of it, that I am not brave enough to face it cheerfully."

It had long been a habit of Betty's, formed in the early days at the Cuckoo's Nest, to comfort herself when things went wrong by imagining how much worse they might have been. Now there was a drop of consolation in the fact that she had never displayed her pride in her book to any but the girls. It had been a temptation to show it to her godmother and Papa Jack and the Colonel, especially after the girls had applauded it so enthusiastically; but the wish for them to see it at its best had made her withhold it in its manuscript form. The climax of her triumph was to be when she placed in their hands a real, full-fledged book. Their criticism might have spared her the humiliation of a rejected manuscript, but she acknowledged to herself that it was easier to have the sentence

passed on it by a stranger than by the three whose opinion she valued most.

Tiptoeing noiselessly around the room in order not to disturb any one at that late hour, she undressed slowly, and creeping into bed sobbed herself to sleep. Betty had always been a sensible little soul, taking her small troubles like a philosopher, and next morning, when she was awakened by the first bird-calls and lay watching the light creep up the wall, the old childish habit of thought asserted itself, bringing an unexpected balm to her sore heart. She had always loved allegories. At the Cuckoo's Nest she had helped herself over all the rough places in her road by imagining that she was Christian in "Pilgrim's Progress," and that no matter how hard a time she was having then, the House Beautiful and the Delectable Mountains and the City of the Shining Ones lay just ahead.

Now in her greater trouble it was the allegory of Edryn that brought comfort, because he, too, had heard the King's call and striven to keep tryst, and she remembered that when he knelt to receive his knighthood, something else besides pearls and diamonds flashed on his vestment above his heart, to form the letters "semper fidelis."

"*An amethyst glowed on his breast in purple*

splendour to mark his patient meeting with Defeat!"

"Maybe without that amethyst he couldn't have spelled all the motto perfectly," thought Betty. She sat up in bed, her face alight with the inspiration of the thought. She had met defeat and she had fallen into a grievous Dungeon of Disappointment, but she needn't stay in it. She sprang out of bed echoing Edryn's words: "Full well I know that Heaven always finds a way to help the man who helps himself, and even dungeon walls must harbour help for him who boldly grasps the first thing that he sees and makes it serve him!"

It was a brave way to begin the day, and it carried her over the first part of it so cheerfully that Mrs. Sherman began to think that she had overestimated Betty's disappointment. It surely could not have been as overwhelming as she imagined. She did not know how many times that day Betty's courage failed her. Edryn's high-sounding words seemed like a hollow mockery and she brooded over the failure till she began to grow morbid and ultrasensitive.

Late that afternoon Mrs. Sherman met her in the back hall with the manuscript in her hands. She was on her way to put it in the kitchen stove.

Promptly rescuing it, Mrs. Sherman finally obtained her reluctant consent to let her read it.

"It is your right," said Betty bitterly, "no matter how much it humiliates me. You have done everything for me, lavished everything on me as if I were really your daughter, and I have disappointed you at every turn. I couldn't be the brilliant social success you hoped for, it was useless to try. And I couldn't be the success in literature you had a right to expect, though I did try that with all my soul, mind and strength. I've been thinking about it all day, and I made up my mind at last, that I'd burn up that miserable story that I wasted so many months on, and then I'd go to you and tell you that under the circumstances it would be better for me to go away, and not be an expense to you any longer. As long as there was a prospect of my amounting to something some day that would make you proud of me, that would repay you in part for all you've done, I didn't mind deepening my obligation to you, but *now*—"

She turned to the window to hide her face, but the next instant she found herself sitting on the top stair with her head on her godmother's shoulder, listening to such loving remonstrances that they should have driven away the last vestige of her

bitter self-condemnation. It did help wonderfully to hear that her godmother and Papa Jack were not disappointed in *her* though grieved for her disappointment; that they loved her for her own dear little self alone, and not for the things they hoped she would achieve, and that they couldn't let her go away, for nobody could ever fill the place of their dear little daughter Betty.

She wiped her eyes after awhile and smiled like an April day, but she still persisted that she must go away somewhere and teach if only to prove that she was good for something.

Much troubled by her evident distress, Mrs. Sherman finally went to talk the matter over with the old Colonel. Mr. Sherman was away from home. Several days after she called Betty into her room.

"Papa has read your manuscript," she said, "and he thinks it would be a good thing to let you have your own way, and go off somewhere for awhile. He says that in his opinion your writing shows unusual promise, and that its only lack is the lack of nearly all young writers, your ignorance of life. You must know more of the world before you can have a message for it that it will stop to listen to. You must live and grow and gain experience, and he thinks the best way for you to do all that, is to

depend on your own resources for awhile, and that the kindest thing we can do is to open the cage and give the little bird a chance to try its own wings. It will never learn to fly as long as we keep it hedged about so carefully.

"He finally convinced me by quoting that legend of 'Camelback Mountain' to me. He says you are like Shapur now, a vendor of salt who as yet can only follow in the train of others — write what has already been written. You haven't *the wares* with which to gain a royal entrance to the City of your Desire. You need some desert of waiting in which to learn the secret of Omar's alchemy."

"I know," said Betty. "I know now what my writing lacks — the attar that gained him his royal entrance." She quoted softly, "'And no man fills his crystal vase with it until he has first been pricked by the world's disappointments and bowed by its tasks.'"

"Oh, Betty, my dear little girl," said Mrs. Sherman taking the earnest face between her hands and looking down fondly into the trusting brown eyes raised to hers. "I suppose it's true, but I can't help wanting to save you from the pricks and the burdens. Still I won't stand in your way. Go ahead, little Shapur, and may the golden gates

swing wide for you, for I know you'll force them open some day, with the filling of your crystal vase."

A quarter of an hour later Betty was hurrying down the road in happy haste, a telegram in her hand for Warwick Hall. It was to Madam Chartley asking if she knew of any vacant position for teachers, in any of the schools of her acquaintance.

CHAPTER X

BY THE SILVER YARD-STICK

With her days shadowed by anxiety over Ida's illness, the care and responsibility of Wardo and her sympathy for Betty's disappointment, Lloyd still found one bright spot, untouched by other people's troubles. If, like the old sun-dial at Warwick Hall, she had taken for her motto: "I only mark the hours that shine," those hours when Leland Harcourt came to teach her Spanish were the ones that would have been numbered.

If she had felt that he regarded it as a bore, or that it cost him the slightest effort, she would have dropped the study immediately; but when he made it plain that it was the chief interest of his days, and the one thing that made his summer in the Valley endurable, she could not help being flattered by his assertions, and exerted herself all the more to make the hour a pleasant one.

It was an agreeable sensation to know that she could interest a man who had known so many in-

terests; that it was she who held him in Lloydsboro; that every turn of her head, every inflection of her voice, every phase of her varying moods had a charm for him. It made her tingle with satisfaction when she realized that she had justified Gay's confidence in her power, but sometimes after he had gone she felt that she was not exerting it to the extent she had promised. She wasn't "keying him up to any higher pitch." She wasn't inspiring him with the ambition which his family seemed to think was all that was necessary to make him capable of any achievement. The idea of her influencing him did not seem as preposterous and ridiculous as it had the first few weeks of their acquaintance, but somehow it did not seem so necessary. Sometimes she wondered if the "sweet doing nothing" that Gay said was in his blood had not affected her also. Maybe that was why she liked his very indolence, and forgave in him what she would have condemned in any other chronic idler. Maybe he was influencing *her*.

"But he sha'n't!" she declared to herself when the thought first startled her, and to prove that he hadn't she seized the first opportunity which came in her way to take him to task. His signet ring bore the same crest that was on the silver ladle,

and he used it one morning to seal a note for her. With a significant glance in its direction she asked saucily, "Señor Tarrypin, when are you going to put your family motto into actual use? When are you going to begin striving till you ovahcome — till you do something really worth while in the world?"

With the question came the quick remembrance of a winter day by the churchyard stile, and Malcolm's boyish voice protesting earnestly — "I'll be anything you want me to be, Lloyd." And then like a flash came that other scene and Phil's pleading voice, "I say it in all humility, Lloyd, this little bit of turquoise kept me 'true blue.'"

If she had expected any such earnestness in Leland's reply she was soon disillusioned, for with an amused side-glance at her, as if he found this serious mood the most diverting of all, he said indifferently:

"Oh — *mañana.*"

"To-morrow!" she translated quickly. "But to-morrow never comes."

"Then neither need the effort."

"But without the effort — the striving," she persisted, looking down at the imprint of the tiny dagger on the seal, "there never will be any crown."

He shrugged his shoulders carelessly. "What's the odds, when one doesn't care for a crown?"

"You're just plain lazy!" she cried, provoked that her effort to inspire him had met with such a reception.

He smiled as if she had paid him the greatest of compliments, then sat up with an air of interest.

"This is a topic we've never struck before," he said lightly. "It's like coming across an inviting bypath we've never travelled over. Now suppose you tell me just what *is* your ideal way for a man to spend his life in order to get the most out of it."

Lloyd stole a quick glance at him to see if he were in earnest. The light tone seemed almost mocking, but the half-closed eyes gazing out across the lawn were serious enough, and she studied her reply a moment, feeling that maybe her opportunity had come at last.

"I think," she began timidly, "that the man who gets the most out of life is the one who makes most of himself — who starts out as they did in the old days to win his spurs and his accolade. Maybe you know the story of Edryn, the one that gave Warwick Hall its motto."

He nodded, with that slightly amused smile which always disconcerted her. "Yes, I know. That's

Gay's pet war-cry — 'Keep tryst.' But go on, I'd like to hear your version of it."

In the face of such an invitation she found it very hard to proceed, but after a moment's hesitation she said almost defiantly:

"Oh, I know you'll considah it a bit of schoolgirl sentiment to look at life in such a figurative way, but I think it's beautiful:

"'*To duty and to sorrow,*'" she quoted softly, "'*to disappointment and defeat thou mayst be called. No matter what the tryst there is but one reply if thou wouldst win thy knighthood!*'"

"But suppose one never hears any call," he asked teasingly. "Never feels the spirit move him to make any particular exertion."

"Then it's yoah own fault!" cried Lloyd. "It's just as it says in the legend. '*Only those will hear who wake at dawn to listen in high places, and only those will heed who keep the compass needle of their soul true to the North star of a great ambition!*'"

"Pretty strenuous work, isn't that, for an August day?" he answered. "And that's all very well for poets and priests and young idealists to dream of, but when all's said and done, what's the good? What's the use?"

Clasping his hands behind his head he leaned back in his chair and began reciting in a dreamy way, as if he were chanting the rhythmical lines, a poem called "Drifting." It was like an incantation, and Lloyd sat listening as if he were weaving some spell around her:

"'My soul to-day
Is far away
Sailing the Vesuvian Bay.
My winged boat,
A bird afloat,
Swims round the purple peaks remote.

. . . . . .

"'I heed not if
My rippling skiff
Float swift or slow from cliff to cliff;
With dreamful eyes
My spirit lies,
Under the walls of Paradise.'"

As he went musically on, verse after verse, Lloyd sat listening, wholly under the spell of his voice, yet with a baffled impotent sense of being carried along by a current in exactly the opposite direction from the one in which she had started to go.

"'No more, no more
The worldly shore
Upbraids me with its wild uproar —'"

It was a Lotus land of irresponsibility and ease and personal gratification that he was revealing to her as his ideal of life. He hadn't openly made fun of her enthusiasm and zeal, but he had chilled her ardour and silenced her, and left her with the feeling that her knights with their struggles after accolades and ambitions and all those things were silly folk who made much ado about nothing. It made her cross.

In the silence that followed there was a shriek from Wardo, somewhere back near the servants' quarters, and then such a lusty crying that Lloyd sprang up frightened, and ran to the rescue. She was conscience-smitten for having left him so long to the care of Enoch, Cindy's little grandson, whom she had bribed to amuse him for an hour. It was only because his constant presence and interruptions seemed to bore Leland that she had done it. Wardo did make tyrannical demands on her attention, she had to admit, dearly as she loved the child. But when she found him crying from a bee-sting, and his poor little lip swollen out of all resemblance to a Cupid's bow she felt a twinge of resentment towards Leland. If she hadn't sent Wardo away from her, she thought reproachfully, he wouldn't have been stung, and she wouldn't have

sent him if Leland had acted nicer about having him around. He had actually muttered in Mom Beck's hearing that it was "a beastly bore always having that kid poking in."

She had resented it at the time Mom Beck repeated it, but excused it on the ground that he was not used to children, and that Wardo's persistent questions and demands did tax one's patience dreadfully sometimes. But now as he clung to her, sobbing and screaming, she thought reproachfully, "He might at least have come around to find out what was the mattah, when he knows how devoted I am to the poah little thing, even if he didn't take any interest in him himself. I'll keep Wardo with me all the time aftah this, even if it does bo'ah him."

Leading him back to the porch she took him in her lap and quieted him with the promise of a wonderful box of paints which he should have next day, with which to colour all the pretty pictures in all the magazines. And she quite ignored Leland for awhile to punish him, not knowing that he understood her pique and was amused at it, and that he was enjoying the picture she made rocking back and forth in the low chair, with Wardo's golden curls pressed

against her shoulder, and the dimpled arms clinging around her neck.

Next day she forgot the paints until it was too late for her to get them, and Betty who was going over to The Beeches and past the store, offered to take Wardo and let him have the pleasure of buying them himself. After they had gone she went down to the porch to wait for Leland. It was almost lesson time. Yesterday's feeling of resentment had entirely passed, and she looked down the avenue expectantly from her seat behind the vines. Any moment he might turn in at the gate. The thought gave her a pleasant thrill of anticipation. As the moments slipped by she opened her book and began repeating the verses marked for her to memorize.

Presently she looked up to see a small coloured boy wandering up the avenue as if he had no particular destination in view and no great desire to arrive anywhere. She supposed he was the bearer of a message to the cook, but instead of going around the house he came towards her with a note in his hand. It was from Leland she saw at the first glance, and written in Spanish at the second.

She could read enough of it to understand that he was not coming that morning, but for the rest

of it she had to turn to her lexicon for help in translating. After some time and with much difficulty she managed to make out the reason. He had gone to Louisville for the day quite unexpectedly with his brother — a matter of business. He was sorry not to be able to keep his engagement with her. Only dire necessity kept him away, and he would be with her in the evening. Until then adieu. She had to turn to her lexicon again for that next word, and having found it wondered how he had dared to put it in — that caressing little name, that word of endearment which he would not have presumed to use in English. It made the colour flame up in her face.

But he was not coming. She let the note fall to her lap with an exclamation of disappointment. Then wide eyed and surprised she sat up straight, suddenly aware how deep that disappointment was; suddenly realizing what she had never known till this moment, how large a place Leland Harcourt had grown to hold in her thoughts. Everywhere she turned she could see his face with that quick flashing smile she loved to bring to it. She could see that impetuous toss of the head, the eager gesture of his long slender hand, the easy grace of

his manner that gave him his distinguished, patrician air.

"Why, I'm like Hildegarde!" she whispered wonderingly. "'His eyes are so blue they fill all my dreams!' Only Mistah Harcourt's are dark."

Now if Lloyd had never heard the story of the Three Weavers, never been a member of the Order of Hildegarde, never made the promise to her father about the silver yard-stick, her reverie in the hammock that morning might have led to a very different result. But because she had promised, and because she must keep tryst no matter how hard it was to do, she faced the matter squarely.

"He wouldn't have put that word in the note if he wasn't beginning to care for me," she admitted, "and it wouldn't make me have that queah little sawt of half-way glad feeling if I wasn't beginning to care for him."

The hammock swung faster. She was thinking of a day on the seashore years before, when she had been playing out on the rocks. And while she built her little castles the tide came creeping in, creeping so quietly that she did not know it was there until all the sand between her and safety was covered and a fisherman had to wade in and carry her out. Although she did not put the comparison

into words, that was what she felt was happening now, and much as she liked him and loved to be with him and missed him when he did not come, she felt that his influence over her was creeping up like a tide that would surely drown her ability to keep her promise to her father.

"He *does* influence me," she admitted to herself. "I might as well be honest about it. Sometimes he can almost make me believe that black is white. How do I know but what I might grow to be like poah mistaken Hertha? He was only a page, but she called him prince in her thought until she really believed him one."

Then as yesterday's conversation came back to her she sprang from the hammock saying to herself, "And he isn't even a knight, or he wouldn't have made fun of my poah little attempt to make him listen to the King's call. I'll not think about him a minute longah. It would only be squandahing the golden thread that Clotho left me."

Running up the stairs she got her hat and started to follow Betty. But all the way up and all the way down and all the way that she went towards The Beeches that little word at the end of the letter — that sweet caressing bird-note of a name, sang it-

self over and over to her. He had called her that, and to-night he was coming.

She did not go all the way to The Beeches, for she met Betty on the way back, Wardo proudly bearing his box of paints, and Betty re-reading a letter which she had found in the office. It was from Madam Chartley. There was a vacancy in Warwick Hall itself and she was to fill it; was to be her beloved Miss Chilton's assistant in the English classes. Her happiness was as great over this news as her disappointment had been over the return of her manuscript. As Madam Chartley wanted her at the school by the first of September there were only two weeks in which to make her preparations to leave.

Although Lloyd had heard the matter discussed she never fully believed that Betty was going away from Locust until she had the letter in her own hands and read Madam Chartley's expression of pleasure at the prospect of having Betty with her permanently. It swept away all thought of her own affairs, for Betty had grown as dear to her as a sister in the years they had been together. She followed her mournfully into the white and gold room, offering to help her with her preparations, and pouring out her regret and her disapproval of

Betty's plans. It wasn't necessary at all she insisted for Betty to leave them, and Locust wouldn't be the same place with her gone.

Wardo required less attention than usual that afternoon, for charmed with his new paints, he sat at a low table in Betty's room while the girls sewed and talked, and coloured the pictures in every magazine he could lay his hands on. It was sunset when Lloyd noticed how long he had been bending over the table, and persuaded him to lay aside his brush till next day.

"Look at the pretty red sunset," she urged, trying to interest him in something else. "It's as red as a cherry."

He looked at it solemnly, considering her comparison. "No, it's wed as the blood of a thousand dwagons," he answered.

Lloyd looked at him in astonishment. "What do you know about dragons, child?"

"Betty telled me, when I painted one wif my paints, here in this book." He began turning the leaves of one of the magazines. "Dwagons is the stwongest fings there is," he added with a knowing wag of his head, feeling that she needed enlightenment. "But my fahvah could fight one — He's so stwong. My fahvah could fight anyfing."

"Always the same old story," said Lloyd in a low tone to Betty. "Isn't it dreadful? Always harping on the perfection of his hero. Seems to me it would have been bettah if she had not tried to keep the truth from him. The disillusionment is going to be feahful some of these days. It will shake his belief in everything."

As she rocked back and forth with his warm little body nestled against her, she thought how differently Ida would have chosen could she have known that this precious little soul was to be given into her keeping. If somebody had only gone to her with old Hildgardmar's warning — "Remember that in the right weaving of this web depends not only thy own happiness but the happiness of *all those who come after thee,*" it might have made a world of difference. But nobody had opened her eyes to the enormity of the responsibility she was assuming, and now, maybe despite all her careful training and frantic efforts to make her little son what she would have him be, she might not be able to turn his life out of the channel of his inherited tastes and appetites.

It must be *awful* she thought, hugging him closer, to love a child with the passionate devotion that Ida loved this one, and have it grow up into a worthless

vagabond like Ned Bannan. Then a stray wonder crossed her mind if Leland Harcourt's mother would have been disappointed in him if she could have lived to see him wasting his splendid talents and opportunities; just drifting along in an aimless, thistledown sort of existence when he might be such a power for good if he would only exert himself.

"He doesn't measuah up to the third notch at all," she admitted with a feeling of regret.

Just then there was a long distance call for her at the telephone, and hastily putting Wardo down she went to answer it.

"It's from Mistah Harcourt," she called carelessly, in answer to her mother's inquiry from the next room. "He was coming ovah to-night but something detained him in Louisville, and he called me up to tell me not to expect him."

She hoped that she had kept the flutter out of her voice that the sound of his voice brought into her pulses. For at the close of this commonplace message was the request that she make no engagement with any one else for the next night. He had something to tell her, and then — there was that same word with which he had closed his note — that soft musical name, seeming twice as personal and significant because of the tone in which he said it. She

felt that he must be conscious of the quick blush it brought to her face as she hastily hung up the receiver.

That night for the first time that summer Lloyd was alone with her father and mother. Betty had Madam Chartley's letter to answer, and the old Colonel had gone out to dinner. The three sat on the broad white-pillared porch in the moonlight, Lloyd on the step at her father's feet, her arm on his knee. Ever since the telephone message her thoughts had been in a tumult. It was useless for her to pretend that she didn't know why Leland wanted to see her alone, and what it was he was coming to tell her. She was glad and sorry and half frightened and altogether confused. "He isn't the prince at all," she kept saying to herself as if it were a charm that would help her ward off his approach and keep her true to her Hildegarde promise.

And yet — his wooing was the kind one reads of in books. She would be sorry to have *that* come to an end. It was so delightful to have some one write poems to her and sing songs in such a way that every tone and glance dedicated them to her alone. If one could only go on that way through all the summers, being adored in that fashion, knowing she was crowned queen in somebody's heart, how

delightful it would be. But she didn't want things to come to a crisis when she would have to make grave decisions and solemn promises. She didn't want to go one step farther than this borderland of romance where they lingered now. What she wanted was just to go on building her little castles as she had done that day on the sea-shore, and yet be assured that the tide wouldn't come creeping up any farther. It was just far enough now to be interesting. She wished they would begin to talk about things like that, but she shrank from bringing up such a subject herself. After awhile she broached one almost akin.

"Mothah," she asked, breaking a long comfortable silence that had fallen on them, "do you think that Lucy is happy?"

"No, not entirely — that is just at present," Mrs. Sherman answered slowly, as if considering. "She's hardly adjusted herself yet to the new order of things, but she will in time because she's such a yielding little soul, and is really devoted to her husband. For instance, when he insisted she gave up her church to please him and joined his. It meant a great struggle and a sacrifice on her part, and he is not at all devout, doesn't attend services more than twice a year; so it couldn't have made

such a vital difference to him where she went. Then at home her father always placed a certain amount in the bank every month to his wife's credit, so there never was any unpleasantness about money matters. While Jameson is very wealthy and lavishes luxuries and beautiful clothes on her, he reserves the pleasure of buying and spending entirely to himself. Treats her like a child in their financial arrangements, and doles out little allowances as if she couldn't be trusted to spend it intelligently. She's so sensitive that she'd rather go without than ask him for a cent, and it often puts her in an embarrassing position to be without."

"In other words," put in Papa Jack, "he's thoroughly inconsiderate and selfish, although I imagine he'd be mightily amazed if any one applied that term to him since he is so lavish in giving things in his own way."

"Yes, he is," was the answer. "I've noticed it in a dozen little ways. It's always *his* wishes and *his* tastes that have to be consulted, never Lucy's. Yet aside from that trait he is a thoroughly fine man, and because she respects him and looks up to him and is such a sweet yielding little creature, he'll come in time to be the centre of her universe, and she'll revolve around him like a loyal little planet.

But a girl of a different temperament wouldn't. If she were impetuous and highstrung like you for instance," she added with a smile at Lloyd, "she would see the injustice of it and resent it so bitterly that there would be continual friction and jar. With your temperament you couldn't live peaceably with anybody like that."

"I know I couldn't," admitted Lloyd frankly, "especially if he showed any jealousy. Mistah Jameson is jealous of every friend Lucy evah had at the Post. He doesn't like it a bit when she refers to the good times she used to have with the boys there, even when they were just ordinary friends. Half a dozen times I've seen the tears come to her eyes at some inconsiderate thing he'd say, and I'd think if I were Lucy I couldn't sit there and take it like a martyr. I'd have to jump up and shake him till his teeth rattled."

"What a cat and dog time you would have," laughed Mrs. Sherman. "Worse than little Mary Ware's nightmare that she had after Eugenia's wedding."

"By the way," exclaimed Mr. Sherman, slapping his pockets to find a letter he had placed in one of them, "I knew there was something I intended to tell you. Jack Ware is on his way here now."

Then in answer to the surprise and the questions that greeted his announcement he explained, "I suggested making him assistant manager of the mines and the Company wants to have a look at him, and put him through a sort of examination. He's so young they rather doubt my judgment in the matter. But they'll find out when they see him. We telegraphed him to come, and he left Arizona several days ago. He'll be here only a day and night probably."

Lloyd left her seat on the step and took a chair beside her father, sitting straight and alert in her interest. It was hard to realize that Jack Ware was grown. He was only fourteen when she had known him on the desert. "Oh, will you evah forget," she laughed, "the way he looked when we surprised him at the washtub, all tied up in an apron, helping Joyce with the family washing?"

"His readiness to pitch in to whatever is to be done is his chief characteristic," was the answer. "That is what makes him so valuable at the mines. Patient and reliable and strong, he is one of the finest young fellows of my acquaintance. He'll be one of the big men of the West some day, for young as he is, he is into everything that makes for

the welfare and development of the territory he lives in."

All the rest of the evening was spent in recalling that visit to Ware's Wigwam, and when Lloyd went up to bed, although Leland Harcourt's name had not been mentioned, she felt that her doubts and unspoken questions about him had been answered. She must not listen any more to that little name, that caressing little name that left such a thrill in its wake.

"Wise old Hildgardmar," said Mrs. Sherman in a playful tone after Lloyd had left them. "I don't suppose when you sent for Jack that it entered your head you were giving her the very safeguard of contrast that I hoped she might have, but you will be doing it all the same."

"No, I didn't," he confessed, "but I think you are magnifying the interest she has in Harcourt. She never mentioned his name all evening."

"But she talked all around him," answered Mrs. Sherman, "and I think she came to the conclusion before she went up-stairs that he does not measure up to your standards, and is almost sure that he does not even meet hers."

CHAPTER XI

THE END OF SEVERAL THINGS

THE old Colonel was in the library, telling for the hundredth time to the small listener on his knee the story of the battle that had taken his right arm. For since Wardo had found that his father's father was in the same wild charge against the Yankees, and had fought like a tiger till a wound in the head and another in the knee sent him to the rear on a stretcher, he could not hear the story often enough. And that led to other tales of things that had happened when the two soldier-friends were schoolboys. It puzzled Wardo to find any resemblance between the mischievous boy whom the Colonel referred to as Cy Bannon, and the dignified judge whose picture hung on the wall of the Colonel's den.

"Oh, his name was Cyrus Edward then, just as yours is now," explained the Colonel when he finally understood the difficulty. "But it was too long a

name for such a grasshopper of a lad. He'd have been out of sight before you could say it all. So they cut it down to Cy, just as yours is cut to Wardo."

"Will I be Judge Cywus Edwa'd Bannon then when I'm gwoed up?" asked Wardo.

The seriousness of the big innocent eyes fixed on him made the Colonel move uneasily. "Heaven knows," he muttered. "*I* don't. But it's to be hoped you'll take after him instead of the one next in line of succession."

The question made such a profound impression on him he could not shake it off, and acting on the impulse of the moment he decided to take it to the Judge himself for an answer. He would show him the winsome little lad who bore his name. He would demand of him what right he had to withhold from him the protection and shelter that was his heritage. The child's father had been cast off in proud scorn for his profligate ways. Secretly the Colonel had always thought that his old friend had shirked responsibility, and that the open repudiation of him by his family had given Ned his final downward shove.

It made no difference to the Colonel that Ned's name was a forbidden one in the household. *He'd*

tell Cy Bannon a few things. Then his face softened and he smiled a trifle foolishly, muttering something about its being a case of the pot calling the kettle black. The Judge might come back at him with the argument that he had been just as harsh with his own child for far less cause; but that would only give him a chance to urge a reconciliation on the ground that *he* had surrendered gracefully, and had been glad of it ever since. Cy would be a mighty queer sort of man, he concluded, if he could hold out against such a little grandson as Wardo. He was a child to walk into anybody's affections.

Lloyd had left the pair so deeply absorbed in war-stories, that she was surprised on her return to the library a little later, to find no trace of either of them. They'd gone for a trolley ride Walker told her, and expected to be gone most of the morning. So relieved of her responsibility Lloyd made a longer visit in Rollington than usual. The crisis had been passed some time now, and Ida was so much better she was beginning to talk about Wardo's return. She would be able to sit up in a few days. As Lloyd entertained her with accounts of Wardo's sayings and doings she realized more and more what a large place he had come to fill in

the household, and how sorely they would all miss him when they had to give him up. Ida's future looked so hopeless. It would be a long time before she would be strong enough to begin sewing again. She talked wearily of the burden she must assume as soon as possible, and Lloyd came away weighed down with a sense of the injustice and wrong in the world and her helplessness to right it.

It was nearly noon when she reached the house. Wardo, who had just come in with her grandfather, rushed down the steps to meet her, his sailor hat on the back of his head, and his arms outstretched to give her glad welcome. He clasped her around the knees, and put up his face to be kissed. His morning's adventures made him feel that he had been away an age. Then his voice trembling with the importance of his news, he announced the three things of his visit which had made the most impression on him.

"I saw the place on my gwan'fahvah's head where the Yankee bullet hit him, wite over his eye! An' the Colonel he shaked his stick at my gwan'fahvah, and got wed in the face when he talked." Then digging down into the mite of a pocket that graced his blouse, he triumphantly brought out the

third item, a silver dollar that Judge Bannon had given him.

By this time the Colonel had come out, and in answer to Lloyd's excited questions confessed the truth of Wardo's tale. He *had* shaken his stick at the Judge. They had had a stormy interview and he lost his temper. He was sorry at first that he had taken Wardo, the child was so frightened, but it proved a good move, for his appealing little face pleaded his cause better than anything else could have done, and in the end the Judge was completely won over by his handsome little namesake.

"*And,*" concluded the Colonel triumphantly, "he's promised to take Ned back and give him one more chance. He'll keep the lad and his mother in any event, and he's to send for them just as soon as she's able to be moved."

"Oh, you blessed old peace-makah!' cried Lloyd running up the steps to throw her arms around his neck and give him as rapturous a hug as Wardo had given her. "You're a perfect darling, and you've made me so happy I don't know what to do or say. I believe I'm as happy as Ida will be when she heahs it, and I'm going ovah there the minute I've had lunch, to tell her. You're a public bene-

factah and everything else in the dictionary that's extra nice and fine."

It was joy to the Colonel to have his praises sung like that, and he went around the rest of the week with a self-satisfied virtuous feeling that kept him beaming benignly on everything and everybody. In such an angelic humour was he, that Walker confided to Mom Beck that he was "right sma'ht worried 'bout ole Marse."

It was a day of surprises for the whole family. On Lloyd's return from her second visit to Rollington, about the middle of the afternoon, she saw Jack Ware on the rear platform of the trolley-car, which passed the carriage when she was nearly home. He had arrived two days sooner than any one expected he could. Taller, broader and browner by far than the slim lad who waved her farewell from the Wigwam, he was unmistakably the same Jack, and she would have recognized him anywhere.

The second glance showed her father standing just behind him. They both leaned out and waved their hats as they passed the carriage. A moment later they were stepping off the car opposite the entrance gate, and waiting for her to come up.

"Anothah knight comes riding," she thought with a smile, wondering what put the whimsical

notion in her head, for she did not count Jack in that class. He was simply her good comrade of the plains, nothing picturesque about *him*.

"I don't suppose there could be about the modern knight," she thought, amused that such fancies should come to her. "His only thought is to 'get there.' When young Lochinvar comes out of the West now, his 'steed *is* the best' from that standpoint, but you can't make the pictuahs and poems out of trolley-cars that you can out of hawses in those old-time fancy trappings."

Stepping out of the carriage, she sent it on ahead and turned to Jack with such a cordial welcome that he reddened with pleasure under the brown of his sunburned cheeks.

"This is my 'Promised Land' as well as Mary's," he said as they walked slowly towards the house, and he paused to look up at the grand old trees arching over them. "You've no idea how I've looked forward to seeing all this. Mother always pictured it as a sort of Beulah land. Then Joyce took up the same tune, and lastly Mary. She's the most enthusiastic of all, and sat up till midnight the day she found I was coming, to make a list of all the things she said I mustn't fail to see or ask about."

Taking a memorandum book from his pocket he opened it and held it out for Lloyd and her father to see. There were three pages whereon Mary had set down instructions for him to follow. Lloyd laughed as she glanced at the head-line.

THINGS TO DO WITHOUT FAIL

1 Make Mr. Rob Moore's acquaintance, and see Oaklea.

2 See The Beeches and all Mrs. Walton's curios, especially the bells of Luzon and mother-of-pearl fire-screen.

3 See if Elise Walton is as pretty as she used to be, and notice how she does her hair now.

4 Ask Lloyd to play on the harp and sing the Dove Song, when the candles are lighted in the drawing-room.

The list was such a long one that Lloyd did not read farther, but glanced at the page headed —

THINGS NOT SO IMPORTANT, BUT I'D LIKE TO KNOW

1 Ask about Girlie Dinsmore if you have a chance. Is she as much of a baby as ever?

2 What has become of that horrid Bernice Howe?

3 Does Betty still correspond with the "Pilgrim Father?"

4 Look in the book-case on the north side of the library, and copy the name of that book on Spiders.

5 Find out all you can about the man Allison is going to marry.

There were a dozen similar items.

"Isn't that characteristic of Mary?" exclaimed Lloyd. "She's such a deah little bunch of curiosity. Maybe I oughtn't to call it that. A live, intense interest in everything and everybody would be moah like it. But only twenty-foah hours to do it all in! How can we manage it?"

"Not even that," answered Mr. Sherman, "for part of it must be spent with the stock-holders."

"And you couldn't stay longah?" began Lloyd.

"No, I'm due back at the mines very shortly, and I want to make a flying visit to Joyce in New York before I return, and stop over at Annapolis for a glimpse of Holland. You know I've never been East before, and I want to make the most of it."

"Well," said Lloyd, planning rapidly as they walked on. "We'll crowd just as much as possible

into this one evening. There'll be time for a drive befoah dinnah, that will give you a bird's-eye view of the Valley, and a short call at Oaklea and The Beeches. We can ansah Mary's questions as we drive along. Befoah we start I'll telephone in to town and ask Rob to come ovah and take dinnah with you to-night, and we'll ask the Waltons to come ovah — "

She would have paused just there even if they had not reached the house and her sentence been interrupted by Jack's introduction to her mother and Betty, for as she mentioned telephoning it flashed across her what Leland had telephoned her, not to make any engagement for that evening, that he wanted to see her alone.

"But suahly," she thought, "he'll undahstand that that is impossible undah the circumstances — the only night Jack will be heah."

The next few hours flew by as if winged. They caught Lloyd up out of the dream-world in which she had been living and thoroughly wakened her. It was such a busy, breezy world from Jack's outlook, so much to do and see and conquer. As she listened to his description of the little mining camp that had grown into a town in the short time he had been there, and then to the enthusiastic plans he

unfolded to her father of what the mine owners might do to develop and civilize it, she found herself regarding this young Aladdin of the West with growing consideration.

He and Rob found mutual interests from the moment of meeting. She noted with surprise how oddly alike they were in their views. She hadn't known before that Rob was interested in so many things that she knew nothing about, political situations and Juvenile Court reforms, and trusts and unions and all those things. But then she had scarcely seen him since he had taken a man's place in the world. Good old Rob! She was proud of the way he was discussing these things with Jack and her father and the Colonel. There was a note of authority in what he said that the older men respected. But it did seem so funny for him to be talking of anything weightier than tennis and skating and his Latin exams. or college scrapes. He talked almost as well as Leland Harcourt she admitted.

After dinner Jack took out his memorandum and crossed off all the items that had been attended to. While they were laughing over Mary's questions and dictating answers for him to write lest he forget them, the Waltons arrived with Gay, who had

been spending the day with them. A little later Alex Shelby followed. He was on Mary's list, and had a number of messages to send to the little girl who had amused him so greatly at Eugenia's wedding with her quaint speeches and unexpected questions.

From the sound of voices and the number of people in the drawing-room, one might have imagined that a reception was in full swing when Leland Harcourt came up on the porch. Lloyd, recognizing his step, hurried out to meet him and explain why she had been unable to grant his request. She ushered him into the drawing-room to meet their guest, anxious that they should be favourably impressed with each other. One could always count on Leland for doing the graceful thing socially she thought complacently, but this one time he failed her.

He had been at the house so constantly all summer that she did not think it necessary to make any special effort for his entertainment now, other than to draw him into the conversation with Jack and Rob. They were the comparative strangers and she was giving them the most of her attention. Rob had been at the house only twice that summer. He was as interested as she in hearing about Joyce

and Mary, so when she found that Leland did not seem to care to talk, she went back to their former conversation, recalling the duck hunt, the picnic at Hole-in-the-rock, and their dinner at "Coffe Al's" with Phil Tremont.

Everybody else was talking. Everybody else seemed in good spirits but Leland Harcourt. Lloyd could almost feel his silence it became so marked.

"He's sulky," she thought. "It's just his horrid jealousy cropping out like his brothah Jameson's. He doesn't want me to be nice to my oldest and deahest friends. I wish he wouldn't act that way."

Then she sang, since it was next in order on Mary's memorandum, and while she sang, although she did not once look at him directly, she was uncomfortably conscious that his eyes were fixed on her with the determined gaze which they always wore when he had some resolve which he intended to carry out at all hazards.

As she turned from the harp he was the first to rise and place a chair for her. Bending over her he said, under cover of the applause, "I'll not be put off any longer. You must let me see you a few minutes just as soon as I can make an opportunity for you to slip out of the room."

Low as his voice was, Rob, who was sitting just behind him, heard what he said, and then something else that he added in Spanish. Just a word, but it seemed to carry some potent appeal, for with a slight flush she rose. Leland made the opportunity he wished, by saying to Jack that one of the pleasures not to be missed was hearing Gay play the violin. Of course Jack immediately asked for the nocturne which he suggested, and Gay, always obliging, at once complied.

Under cover of the music Leland stepped into the hall, holding the portière aside with a bow for Lloyd to pass through. Rob's glance followed them across the hall, across the moonlighted porch to the avenue, where the locust shadows fell dense and black. Then he turned his attention resolutely to the music, listening as if in rapt enjoyment, but in reality never hearing a note.

The nocturne came to an end, and there was an encore and still another before Lloyd came back into the room. She was alone, and Rob, in one quick glance, saw that all the bright colour had left her face. She was gripping her little lace fan nervously, and her hazel eyes had deepened almost to black as they always did under the strain of unusual excitement or emotion. He was sure that she was very

near tears, and with his usual impulse to shield her from all that was unpleasant, he moved his chair so that no one else saw her agitation and began talking volubly about the first thing he could think of. It happened to be Mary Ware's method of getting rid of an unwelcome guest by playing Fox and Stork, and as she listened to the lengthy story he purposely made of it, she had time to regain her composure before any one else came up.

Afterwards he heard her explaining to Mrs. Walton, "Mistah Harcourt had to leave early, and didn't want to break up the pah'ty by coming in to say good night."

When Rob heard next day that Leland was leaving the Valley at once for a trip to South America, he thought he understood the cause of Lloyd's agitation. It distressed her to have him go so far away. He had been positive for some time that there was some understanding between them. Now this confirmed his suspicions.

Lloyd was grieved over the parting, but not to the extent Rob imagined. Many a night after, she sat curled up on the window-seat in her room, looking down through the trees to the place where she had stood with Leland the night she bade him good-bye. She had not dreamed of such a stormy

interview as that, she had not imagined any wooing could be so impassioned, reaching to such heights and depths. He hadn't paid the slightest attention when she tried to stop him, but had asserted triumphantly that he always got what he started out to win, and that this was a matter of life and death, and he'd win her love or die in the attempt. Sometimes, in thinkng it over, she was afraid he would make his threats true, and then sometimes she thought with a quick indrawn breath, remembering how his wild protestations had thrilled her, that it would have been sweet to listen if she could only have been sure that it was right. He vowed he would come back when he could prove to her that he had won the accolade which she seemed to think was so essential, but she did not look for him. In her heart she said that the one real romance of her life was at an end.

Everything seemed to come to an end just then. Jack left the next morning, and before the close of the week Wardo was taken away. Ida was able to be moved to the old Bannon homestead near Anchorage. Although it was the one great thing Lloyd had wished for, she missed her little charge at every turn, and the days stretched out ahead of her long and empty.

The first of September Betty went away with Elise Walton under her wing, happy in the fact that she was to enter Freshman at Warwick Hall, where the older girls had had such glorious times. The next day the Harcourts closed the Cabin and went back to San Antonio. Gay spent her last night in the Valley at The Locusts, and there were more bed-time confidences before they fell asleep, long after midnight.

"Seems as if the end of the summah brings the end of everything," sighed Lloyd regretfully.

"It's more like the beginning of everything for you," contradicted Gay. "You'll be beginning your shopping soon, and your trips to the tailor and the dressmaker and the milliner, and you know you'll enjoy getting all the lovely clothes you're to have as a débutante. It'll be as much fun as planning a trousseau. Then there'll be your début party in your Aunt Jane's lovely big town house, and all the rest that's to follow. It'll be just *grand!* A regular procession of social successes and triumphs.

"And as for Leland," she continued, mentioning him for the first time since his departure. "You needn't worry about *that*. Of course we knew what had happened just as soon as he bounced in looking like a thunder-cloud, and announced his intention

of leaving next morning. We'd seen it coming on all summer. Jameson is tickled to death over it, for this trip to South America is one he has been wanting him to take for a long time. They have some property there that needs looking after, and he thinks now that his ambition is roused he'll take some interest in things."

"But no mattah what he does," said Lloyd firmly, "I'll nevah change my mind. I don't want to get married, Gay," she added almost tearfully. "I read a story the othah day, the diary of a young girl that made me think of myself. She said, 'I don't want to be married. Just to be loved and adored and written to and crowned Queen of Somebody's heart.' Of co'se any girl wants *that*."

"That's just the way I feel," confided Gay after a moment's pause. Then, "You've been so busy this summer with your own affairs I don't suppose you've noticed what's been going on around you; but I'm afraid I've got myself into a pickle. You see I've already invited Kitty down to San Antonio to spend Lent with me, and I've written to Frank Percival about her, and told her about him and got them interested in each other. You know ever since I've been so intimate with Kitty I've wanted her to marry Frank, so that she'd always live near me.

And now — now I'm not so sure that I'm going to live there myself."

"You dreadful little match-makah," laughed Lloyd, so amused by Gay's confession that she never thought to inquire what had caused her change of mind about her own residence. "You oughtn't to meddle in such things. Just look what a pickle you got *me* into. If you hadn't made me promise what you did about being nice to Mistah Harcourt, and told him the things you did about me, we'd nevah have had the scene we did, and would have been good friends always. But look what you've done. Sent him on a hopeless chase aftah a shadow, for he says he'll nevah change his mind, and I *know* I won't change mine."

Gay giggled. "When an irresistible force meets an immovable body, what *does* happen? I've always wondered."

"Just what will happen when Mistah Harcourt comes back," was Lloyd's dignified answer. "*I'll* not be moved."

"And he's not to be resisted," said Gay. "So there we go in the same old circle. But I'm glad for some reasons that you're so determined, for if I *should* make up my mind to live in the Valley

then I'd be glad you were here instead of in San Antonio."

"Oh, are you all going to buy the Cabin?" exclaimed Lloyd, sitting up in bed in her eagerness. "How lovely."

"No, 'we all' are not," confessed Gay. "I *knew* you didn't have any idea of what was going on this summer. But — well, you know who my first 'Knight of the Looking-glass' was. He says the Scripture says that 'the first shall be last,' and he insists he is *both*. He wants to buy the Cabin some day, so that my little mirror can hang there always, up among the roses where he first saw me. It *would* be sweet and romantic, wouldn't it? But it doesn't seem exactly fair to Kitty to get her tied up down there and then skip out and leave her."

"Kitty isn't tied up yet, by a long shot," laughed Lloyd, who found it hard to take Gay's shy confession seriously. "But I can't get used to this lightning change in you. You were so suah you'd not have any Darby and Joan emotions in yours while 'Life is May.' You've talked all summah against early marriages."

"I'm not an 'immovable body' like you. And I would be a little nearer gray hairs if we waited for two years as we'd certainly have to do, but even if

we didn't wait it wouldn't be the same as it is with Lucy and Jameson, and some other young married people I know. Alex is so *different*. Well, he is," she insisted indignantly. "What are you laughing at? You know he's different."

"Yes, I do know it," answered Lloyd, instantly sobered by her realization of the fact that Gay was no longer joking, but was laying bare her heart's dearest secret. "He's a deah, good fellow, and he'll be just as loving and true and sweet to you always as the old Doctah is to Aunt Alicia. Nobody could want moah than that I'm suah. So heah's my blessing and the hope that you'll live to keep yoah Golden Wedding as happily as they are going to do." She leaned over and kissed her tenderly.

They talked so late that night that Gay almost missed her train next morning, but as she scrambled breathlessly on to the rear platform she called back happily, "What's the odds, even if it did make me late? It was such a nice wind-up to such a glorious summer."

CHAPTER XII

SIX MONTHS LATER

It was a cold snowy afternoon, late in January. Rob Moore, looking at his watch as he hurried along the street, found that he was ten minutes ahead of the time at which the next car was due to start to the Valley. Rather than wait on the windy corner or take refuge in the already crowded drug-store, he walked on down to the car-shed. He rarely left town this early. As he sprang up the steps and took his seat in the waiting car, he saw that it was the one usually filled by the school-children living in the suburbs. It was already nearly filled now by half-grown boys and girls, flocking in with their book straps and lunch-baskets. It made him think of his own High school days. They laughed and joked and called messages back and forth as freely as if they were at home. Here and there he recognized the younger sisters and brothers of some of his old classmates, so like them

that it gave him a curious sense of having stepped backward several years. There was Wat Sewall wriggling and writhing out of his overcoat with the same contortions that Fred always went through with. That slap on the back with its accompanying "Hi, there, old man," was exactly like T. D. Williams' salutation. He nearly always laid a fellow out flat when he spoke to him. And the couple on the seat in front of him, exchanging class pins, was only a repetition of a scene he had witnessed dozens of times.

With a reminiscent smile he shook out the pages of the evening paper which he had bought as he came along and glanced at the head-lines. But before he had time to read further the girl in front of him exclaimed, "Look, Harry! Here comes Miss Sherman! Isn't she perfectly stunning in that dark blue broadcloth? I think she's the prettiest débutante of the season."

"She's a peach," was the enthusiastic answer. "I say, Ethel, she looks like you."

Rob did not see the girlish blush which rose to Ethel's cheeks, for at the first exclamation he had lowered his paper to peer quickly through the window. He had just a glimpse of a slender stylish figure hurrying into the ticket office.

The girl in front was speaking. "I suppose I've been more interested in the débutantes this year than any other because Cousin Amy is one of them. She comes out to Anchorage for a week-end now and then to rest up, and I keep her talking the whole time about what they do. She says that Miss Sherman is the most popular of them all, with the girls as well as the men. She's had so many beautiful entertainments given in her honour, and she's been asked to help receive or pour tea or do something or other at every single function that's been given in Louisville this winter. I think it's perfectly grand to be out in society when you can be as great a success as that. They say that the American Beauties sent to her in just one day sometimes would fill a florist's shop window. There's a man from Cincinnati who sends them all the time. He's crazy about her. I should be too if I were a man. Cousin Amy has a photograph of her taken in evening dress, and she's simply regal looking. I don't wonder she makes a sensation wherever she goes."

"Here she comes now," interrupted the boy, turning with a stare of frank admiration. Rob turned too, as Lloyd came down the aisle, glancing from one side to another for an empty seat. Her

face was glowing from her walk in the cold wind, and the little hat of dark blue velvet and her rich dark furs made her seem fairer than ever by contrast. Hers was a delicate, patrician style of beauty, and Rob in one critical glance saw that this winter in society had given the graceful girl the ease and poise of a charming woman. The little school-girl on the seat in front had good reason for admiring her so extravagantly. He rose as she came nearer, and stepped out in the aisle to give her the seat by the window.

"Oh, Rob! This is great!" the little school-girl heard her exclaim cordially. "I haven't seen you for an age. How does it happen you are going out on such an early train?"

Much as she was interested in "Harry's" remarks, she wished he would keep still at least until the car started. She wanted to hear how this big handsome man answered her adorable Miss Sherman. She would have been shocked could she have heard his second remark.

"There's a big flake of soot on your nose, Lloyd."

"Thanks," she said, almost looking cross-eyed in her endeavour to locate it. "There usually is in this dirty town. There! Is it off?" She scrubbed

away with a bit of a handkerchief she took from her muff. "And I was flattering myself as I came along that I looked especially spick and span," she sighed. "It's refreshing to have somebody tell you the truth about yoahself, and you nevah were one to mince mattahs, Bobby."

The old name on the lips of this pretty girl so like the old Lloyd in some ways, yet so bewilderingly unlike in others, stirred him strangely.

"Better throw off your furs and that heavy jacket in this over-heated car," was his only answer. "You'll take cold when you get off if you don't." She thanked him for the suggestion, and, as he hung her wraps over the back of the seat, settled herself comfortably for the hour's ride.

"Now tell me all about it," he began as the car started. "All that you've been doing these last months. Of course I've kept up with you in the papers. I know that you went here and went there, and that you wore sky-blue pink folderols at this banquet and velvet satin crêpe de chine at the Country Club dinner, with feathers and jewels to match, but that's no more than all the rest of the world knows. I want to be let in on the ground floor and told about the inner workings of this social whirl. How have you managed to do it all? To vibrate be-

tween town and country and not peg out. You look as fresh as a daisy; as if the pace that kills agrees with you."

"I haven't vibrated much," she answered. "I've made Aunt Jane's house my headquartahs, and you know what a crank she is about hygiene. Every moment not actually engaged in 'whirling' she had reduced to a system of simple living. What I have suffered in the way of naps in a darkened room when I wasn't sleepy, and hot milk when I loathed the idea of swallowing anything, and gymnastic exercises in the attic when the weathah was too bad for long walks, would fill a volume."

"Is the game worth the candle?" he asked soberly.

She hesitated. "Well, yes. For a season anyhow. I wouldn't want to keep up such a round yeah aftah yeah, but I *have* had a good time, and I must confess it's awfully nice to be really grown up and have everybody treat you with the consideration due yoah age."

They were out in the open country now. The car stopped, and as the door opened to admit a passenger, the shrill voices of some children skating on an ice pond near the road floated cheerily in.

Lloyd looked out the window with a smile at the gay scene.

"I'd like to be out there with them," she confessed. "Look at that little girl in the red mittens and Tam O'Shanter. She skates exactly the way Katie Mallard used to. Oh, deah, didn't we used to have fun with her down on our ice pond?"

"Do you remember the day Malcolm broke through when he was trying to cake-walk on the ice?" asked Rob with a reminiscent grin.

"He was laughing about that only last week when he took me to the Country Club dinnah. I've seen a lot of Malcolm this wintah."

"I thought he was rushing Molly Standforth."

"Well, he is, pah't of the time, but he's rushed me too, as you call it, just as much."

Rob gave her a keen glance, but she made the announcement in such a calm way that he said to himself there couldn't be much in it as far as she was concerned, or she wouldn't have spoken of it in the way she did.

At Anchorage the boy and girl in front left the car, he with such open solicitude for her comfort as he helped her off that Lloyd's eyes met Rob's with a twinkle.

"Aftah all, it's good to be young like that," she

said. "Don't you remembah Kitty and Guy Ferris at that age? How we used to tease Kitty for keeping a dead rose and a valentine and a brass button from his military coat, tied up with a blue ribbon in a candy box?"

"But we boys had a better time teasing Guy about the lock of Kitty's hair that he carried around in the back of his watch. His watch got out of order, and when the jeweller opened it and found all that hair in the back, he didn't say a word, but with a most disgusted look tossed it into the waste-basket as if it hadn't been Guy's most sacred possession. I was along with him, and I simply roared. Guy didn't have the nerve to ask for it, just stood there looking like the big silly he must have felt."

The series of reminiscences that this story started lasted all the way out to the Valley. The red streak of the wintry sunset had faded out of the west when the car stopped there, and Lloyd looking out into the cold gray gloaming saw that the snow was beginning to fall again.

"Let's get out and walk the rest of the way," she exclaimed impetuously, snatching up her jacket and furs as she rose.

"I haven't had a twilight walk in the country this

wintah, when it's all good and gray like this, with snow-flakes in yoah face."

They were off in another instant, and as he stood on the station platform helping her on with her wraps, she held up her face to feel the stray flakes blowing cold and soft against it. He smiled at her childish delight in them, and seeing the smile she started up the narrow path ahead of him, laughing over her shoulder.

"There's no use denying it," she called back. "When I want to be the propah dignified young lady I'll have to stay in town. Just the smell of the country, the fresh earth, the fallen leaves, has such a rejuvenating effect that I want to tuck up my skirts and skip and run as I used to."

"Come on," he exclaimed gaily, falling in with her mood. "I'll race you to that dead sycamore up the road."

She looked up at him, her face dimpling as she noticed how he towered above her and how broad were the shoulders in the big overcoat. Then she shook her head sadly.

"Nevah again, Bobby! We're too old and dignified. I'd almost as soon think of racing with the Judge as with you now. What if somebody should see us? They'd be shocked to death.

There's some one now," she added, peering forward through the dusk.

"Only old Unc' Andy coming back from his rabbit traps," answered Rob, as the grizzled old coloured man shuffled nearer. Uncle Andy had been the gardener at Oaklea more years than Lloyd could remember, and now as he stepped out of the path with elaborate courtesy to let her pass, she delighted his soul by stopping with a friendly inquiry about himself and family.

"Lawd, if it aint the Little Cun'l herself!" he chuckled. "All growed up and a bloomin' like a piney! I reckon, Miss Lloyd, youse forgot the time that you pulled up all the pansies in my flowah beds 'cause you said they was makin' faces at you."

"No, indeed, Uncle Andy," she answered with a laugh, and started to pass on. But the encounter with the old servant seemed somehow to set her back among the days when she had been almost as much at home at Oaklea as she was at The Locusts, and prompted by some sudden impulse she called over her shoulder as she had often called then: "Unc' Andy, tell Mrs. Moore that Mistah Rob won't be home for dinnah. He's going to stay at The Locusts."

It was a familiar message although it had been

several years since Andy had heard it. He looked back bowing and scraping, and then walked on chuckling to himself.

Taken by surprise, Rob did not remonstrate when she thus took his consent for granted. If she had waited to ask his permission to send such a message home he would have made some excuse to decline, and then left her at the gate. That night under the measuring tree when he listened to her singing he had resolutely made up his mind to keep out of the way of temptation. Since then he had become convinced that she was engaged to Leland Harcourt and had put her out of his dreams as far as possible. Now that she had left him no choice, he gladly accepted the opportunity that fate seemed to throw in his way, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of it.

The fitful snow had stopped falling again by the time they reached the gate, and the stars were beginning to glimmer through the bare branches of the locust-trees. As Lloyd looked up the avenue, and saw the lights from many windows streaming out across the white-pillared porch into the winter night, her gay mood suddenly changed to one of intense feeling.

"Isn't it deah?" she said in a low voice. "I

nevah had it come ovah me so overwhelmingly, how good it is to come back to the things that nevah change — that nevah fail! The home-lights and the home-loves, the same old trees and the same old sta'hs and the same old chum!"

Rob made no answer, but his silence was only another proof to Lloyd that she had found her old chum unchanged. He never answered at the times when she knew he felt most deeply. Rob's silences expressed more sometimes than other people's speeches.

He was talkative enough at dinner, however, and between them he and Lloyd made the meal such a lively one that the old Colonel heaved a sigh when it was over.

"I'd give a good deal if our whist club didn't meet to-night," he said in response to Lloyd's question. "I surely would have asked them to postpone it if I had known you were coming out to-night."

"Suahly not a time-honahed institution like that!" exclaimed Lloyd teasingly, "and when it's yoah turn to entahtain it. Rob, we haven't found out what refreshments mothah has for them. Think of wasting all this time without knowing."

It had always been a matter of interest with

them in earlier times to have a finger in this particular pie. It was one thing in which Mrs. Sherman was most careful to humour her father's whims, and she always pleased him by giving her personal attention to the dainty little suppers which she served after the game.

Lloyd led the way to the pantry and they lifted covers and opened doors, smelling and peering around till they unearthed all the tempting dishes that had been so carefully prepared for the occasion.

"We'll be in at the end," warned Lloyd as the Colonel's old cronies began to arrive, "and in the meantime I'll pop some cawn. I used to think that old Majah Timberly came for my cawn as much as he did for the game."

To his great annoyance a telephone message called Mr. Sherman over to the Confederate Home. He had looked forward to a quiet evening in front of the great log fire, and was loath to leave the cosy room and cheerful company. Presently some household matters claimed Mrs. Sherman's presence up-stairs, and she too had to go, leaving Lloyd at the piano, playing runs and trills and snatches of songs as a sort of undercurrent to their conversation. Rob in a big armchair in front of the fire, looking

comfortable enough to want to purr, glanced around the familiar old room that long association had made as dear to him as home.

"Why don't you read your letters?" he asked, his gaze happening to rest on a pile of various sized envelopes lying on the table near him, all bearing Lloyd's name.

She turned around on the piano stool and held out her hand for them as he rose to take them to her.

"I forgot all about the possibility of there being any mail for me," she said, tearing open the first one. "This is from Betty. I know you want to hear that, so I'll read it aloud."

Crossing the room she seated herself under one of the silver sconces in the chimney corner, so that the candlelight fell on the paper. She had never relinquished the idea that came to her on her return from school that Rob was growing especially fond of Betty. It seemed to her such a desirable state of affairs that she longed to deepen his interest in her.

"I am not being carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, by any manner of means," wrote Betty. "Life at Warwick Hall as a pupil is one thing. It is quite another to be a teacher. But I'm

gaining experience and that's what I came for, and best of all I'm having some little successes that make me take heart and feel like attempting more. I have had two little sketches of school-girl life accepted and *paid for* (mark the paid for) by the *Youth's Companion,* and a request for more. *'True hope is swift and flies with swallows' wings. Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings.'* You can imagine how happy I am over it, and what castles in the air I am already building again."

It was a long newsy letter, telling of a reception she had attended at the White House, to which she took half a dozen girls in Madam Chartley's place, and describing a famous lecturer who had been at the Hall the day before.

"Betty's a girl in a thousand!" said Rob approvingly as she slipped the letter back in its envelope "She's a dear little piece, with sense and pluck enough for a dozen."

His hearty tone confirmed Lloyd's suspicions, and she looked as pleased as if he had paid her a compliment instead of Betty. She led him on to express a still deeper appreciation, by telling of some of the things that Elise Walton had written home about Betty's kindness to the new girls and

how they all adored her. Then she opened the next letter.

"From Phil Tremont," she said, glancing down the page. "He's back in New York and has just seen Eugenia, who is still delighted with housekeeping, and makes an ideal home for Stewart and the doctor. And he's seen Joyce," she added, turning the page, "and Joyce is as happy as a clam, struggling along with a lot of art-students in a flat, and really doing well with her book-cover designs and illustrations."

She read a paragraph aloud here and there, then hastily looked over the last part in silence, laying it down with a little sigh. Rob glanced up inquiringly. "I wish he wouldn't make such a to-do about my writing moah regularly. It makes a task of a correspondence instead of a pleasuah, to know that every two weeks, rain or shine, I'm expected to send an answah. I like to write if I can choose my own time, and wait till the spirit moves me, but I despise to be nagged into doing it."

"You write to Betty every week," he suggested.

"Yes, sometimes twice or three times. But that's different. I haven't seen Phil for two yeahs and when you don't see people for a long time you can't keep in touch with them."

"The song says, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,'" quoted Rob mischievously.

"Maybe it does if you're old friends, and have lots to remembah togethah, but it seems to me that absence builds up a sawt of wall between people sometimes, especially if you've known each othah only a little while, and at a time when you're both growing up and changing all the time. Do you know," she added musingly, dropping the letter into her lap and leaning forward to gaze into the fire, "I believe if Phil and I had been togethah daily I'd have grown awfully fond of him. When we were out on the desert in Arizona, I was only fou'teen that spring, he was my ideal of all that was lovely and romantic, and I believe if it hadn't been for those talks Papa Jack and I used to have about Hildegarde and her weaving, I'd have done like foolish Hertha, cut my web for him then and there. I did imagine for awhile that he was a prince, and the one written for me in the sta'hs."

"And now?" asked Rob, in a low tone, as if afraid of interrupting the confession she was making more to the fire and herself than to him.

"Now," she answered, "when he came back to be best man at Eugenia's wedding I still liked him awfully well, but I could see that my ideals

had changed and that they didn't fit him any moah 'as the falcon's feathahs fit the falcon.' Still I don't know, maybe if we had been thrown togethah a great deal from the time I first met him, it might have been different, but as I say, absence made a sawt of wall between us and we seem to be growing farthah and farthah apart."

"And now you're sure he's not the one the stars have destined for you?"

"Perfectly suah," she answered with a laugh, then leaning back in the chimney corner again, opened the third letter. The envelope slipped to the floor as she read, and stooping over to return it, he saw quite unintentionally that it bore a South American stamp. She was reading so intently that she did not notice when he laid it in her lap, but as soon as she finished she tossed it into the fire without a word. Her face flushed and her eyes had an angry light in them. As she caught his grave look, she shrugged her shoulders with a careless little laugh, to hide the awkward pause, and then said lightly:

"I think Mammy Eastah's fortune will come true. There won't be any prince in my tea-cup."

"Why?"

"Wait till I get the cawn-poppah and I'll tell you."

She was back in a moment with the popper and several ears of corn which she divided with Rob, and started to shell into the big dish which she placed on the floor between them. She shelled in silence a moment or two.

"It's this wintah in society that's given me that opinion," she said finally. "The view I've had of it through my Hildegarde mirror. The knights have come riding, lots of them, and maybe among them I might have found my prince in disguise, but the shadows of the world blurred everything. Out heah in the country I'd grown up believing that it's a kind, honest old world. I'd seen only its good side. I took my conception of married life from mothah and Papa Jack, Doctah Shelby and Aunt Alicia, and yoah fathah and mothah. They made me think that marriage is a great strong sanctuary, built on a rock that no storm can hurt and no trouble move. But this wintah I found that that kind of marriage has grown out of fashion. It's something to jest about, and it's a mattah of scandal and divorce and unhappiness. Sometimes it made me heart-sick. the tales I heard and the things

"SHE POURED THE CORN INTO THE POPPER AND BEGAN TO SHAKE IT OVER THE RED COALS."

I saw. I came to little Mary Ware's conclusion, that it's safah to be an old maid."

Drawing a low stool nearer the fire, she poured the corn into the popper and began to shake it over the red coals.

"It's dreadful to be disillusioned," said Rob, smiling at her serious face. "That's one reason why I keep so 'far from the madding crowd.' My old friends have been good about remembering me with invitations and I've been sorely tempted to accept some of them just to see what kind of a show was going on. But I couldn't accept one and refuse another and I couldn't afford to go in wholesale; carriages and flowers and the bummed up feeling that follows make it too expensive for a poor man like me. It's nearly over now, I suppose, anyway."

"Yes, the fancy dress ball on Valentine's night will be the last big thing befoah Lent."

"Who is to be your escort?"

"Mistah Whitlow, probably. He hasn't asked me yet, but he saw Aunt Jane this mawning and told her not to let me make any engagement, for he was coming to ask me as soon as I got back to town Monday."

"Bartrom Whitlow!" exclaimed Rob, shifting

his easy lounging position to an upright one, and looking very stern. "Lloyd, you don't mean to say you're going with *that* man! He isn't fit to be invited to decent people's houses, much less fit to shake hands with their daughters. Some of the others are bad enough, goodness knows, but he is the limit. You simply can't go with him."

"Well, you needn't ro'ah so," exclaimed Lloyd with a little pout, as if she resented his dictatorial, big-brother tone. Secretly it pleased her, for it had been a long time since she had heard it.

"Rather than let you go with him I'll accept my invitation and take you myself!"

"What a sweet martyr-like spirit!" laughed Lloyd, teasingly. "I certainly feel flattered at the way you put it, and I appreciate the great sacrifice you're willing to make for my sake. Of co'se I don't want to go with Mistah Whitlow if that's the kind of man he is, but it seems rathah late in the day to raise a row. He's called on me several times this wintah and sent me flowahs and danced with me, just as he does with all the othah girls. I know Aunt Jane believes he is all right, because she is very particulah about my company. I can't see any way to get out of going with him as long as she's given him to undahstand that I would, but for me

to hold you to yoah offah and make you make a martyr of yoahself on the altah of friendship."

"You know very well, Lloyd Sherman, *no* fellow would count it martyrdom to escort the most popular débutante of the season to the last great function."

She opened her eyes wide, astonished at such an unusual thing as a compliment from Rob.

"Oh, I'm just quoting," he added to tease her. "That's what I heard an enthusiastic admirer of yours call you on the car this evening. But I'm in dead earnest, too. My offer is a sincere one."

"Very well," responded Lloyd quickly, "I'll hold you to it. I suppose you've seriously considahed it. You'll have to go in fancy costume, you know."

His face showed plainly that he had not thought how much his offer involved, but after an instant's hesitation he made a wry grimace and laughed. "That's all right. I die game. I haven't been to anything for two years, but I'll see you through on this deal. 'I'll never desert Micawber.' Name the character I'm to represent and I'll get the costume."

"I think a Teddy beah would be most in keeping if you're going to glowah and growl the way you did a moment ago, or anything fierce and furious;

Bluebeard for instance. That would be fine, and I'll carry a bloody key and you can drag me around by the hair as an object lesson to all thoughtless girls who weave their mantles to fit unworthy shouldahs instead of using their yah'd sticks to do it right."

"That old tale seems to worry you a lot, Lloyd."

"It does," she confessed. "I've thought about it every day this wintah. Now this is all ready for the salt and buttah," she added as the last grain in the wire cage burst into snowy bloom. "I'll take it ovah to the old gentlemen while it's hot. You can be popping the next lot while I'm gone."

Mrs. Sherman joined them presently, and the question of costumes was settled. "There's no use of yoah going to any expense for one," said Lloyd, with her usual delicate consideration. "There are trunkfuls of lovely things still in the attic. Come ovah next week and we'll look through them."

So it came to pass that the old intimacy was, in a measure, resumed, for several calls were necessary to complete the arrangements for Valentine night. That those arrangements were highly satisfactory might have been inferred from the account of the affair which appeared in the Society columns next

day, in which Miss Sherman and Mr. Rob Moore were awarded the palm for the most unique and striking costumes. They had gone as Bluebeard and his beautiful Fatima. It was the crowning good time of the season, Lloyd declared, for Rob under cover of his disguise entered into the spirit of the occasion with all his old zest, and when Rob tried, nobody could be better company than he. After that he fell into the way of an occasional call at The Locusts. He was too busy to spare many evenings, but when Lloyd came back to the Valley, nearly every Sunday afternoon was spent in their old way, taking long tramps together through the quiet country lanes and winter woods.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MIRACLE OF BLOSSOMING

THE beginning of Lent was the end of all the social gaieties and most of the girls who had flittered through the season with Lloyd fluttered away like a bevy of scattered butterflies to various resorts on the Florida coast. Kitty departed to make her long-talked-of visit to Gay in San Antonio, Katie Mallard went with an invalid aunt to Biloxi, and Lloyd came back to the country. She was almost as much alone as she had been that winter when she had not been allowed to return to Warwick Hall after the Christmas vacation.

True, Allison was at home after her interesting trip abroad, with the MacIntyres, and Lloyd spent many hours at The Beeches. But Raleigh Claiborne's sister from Washington was there on a visit part of the time, and Raleigh himself made several flying trips, and although Allison's engagement made her doubly interesting to the younger girls,

it seemed to rise up as a sort of wall between them and their old intimacy. She had so many new interests now that she did not enter quite so heartily into the old ones.

So it came about that Lloyd fell quite naturally into her former habit of dropping in to see Mrs. Bisbee and Mrs. Apwell and all the other old ladies, who welcomed her with open arms. One blowy afternoon in March she took her embroidery and went to sit with Mrs. Bisbee awhile, beside the window that Mrs. Walton had laughingly dubbed the "window in Thrums." The old lady, growing chatty and confidential over her quilt-piecing, seemed so unusually companionable, that Lloyd remarked:

"It really seems as if I'm catching up to you all, Mrs. Bisbee. As I get oldah everybody else gets youngah. Why, this wintah mothah has been just like a sistah. I had no idea she could be so much fun. We do everything togethah now. I help with the housekeeping so that she can hurry through with it early in the mawning and then we practise, piano and harp, or she plays the accompaniments for my songs. And then we read French awhile and we go for long walks and we discuss every subject undah the sun, just as Betty and I used to do. And we plan things to do in the deliciously

long cosy evenings — surprises, you know, for grandfathah and Papa Jack. I believe I'm enjoying this pah't of my yeah bettah than the first."

Mrs. Bisbee looked out of the window wistfully at nothing.

"That's the way that it used to be here when daughter was at home," she sighed. "Sometimes I think if I'd had the planning of the universe I'd have fixed it differently. Just when your little girl is grown up to be a comfort and a joy, and the best company in the world, some man steps in and takes her away from you. I had daughter to myself only one short year after she got through school. Then she married. Of course it would have been selfish to have stood in the way of her happiness, yet — "

She shook her head with another sigh, and left the sentence unfinished. "I have often wondered how I could have stood it if her marriage had been an unhappy one, like poor Amy Cadwell's. You know her."

"Only slightly," answered Lloyd, recalling a face that always aroused her interest; a face with thin compressed lips and watchful defiant eyes, that seemed to have grown so from the long guarding of a family skeleton.

It was not gossip the way Mrs. Bisbee told the

story, only the plain recital of a sad bit of human history that had fallen under her observation. The cloud of it rested on Lloyd's face as she listened.

"That's the worst thing about growing up," she exclaimed bitterly when Mrs. Bisbee paused, "the finding out that everybody isn't good and happy as I used to think they were. Lately, just these last few months that I've been out in society I've heard so much of people's jealousies and rivalries and meannesses and insincerity, that I'd sometimes be tempted to doubt everybody, if it were not for my own family and some of the people out in this little old Valley that I've trusted all my life.

"There's Minnie Wayland, whose engagement was announced last month to Mistah Maybrick. I don't see how she dares marry when her own fathah and mothah made such a failure of it, that they can't live togethah, and Mistah Maybrick's wife got a divorce from him on account of some dreadful scandal the papahs were full of. I couldn't go up and wish her joy when the othah girls did. She talked about it in such a flippant mattah of business way, as if millions atoned for everything. One of the girls laughed at me for taking it so seriously, and said that matches aren't made in heaven nowadays, and that I'd have to get ovah my old-fashioned Puri-

tanical notions and ideals if I expected to keep up with the sma'ht set. I thought for awhile that maybe it was only the sma'ht set who are that way, but what you've just told me about Mrs. Cadwell, and what I've heard lately about several families right in our own little neighbahhood, shows that it's *all* a bad old world, and these yeahs I've been thinking it so good I've been blind and ignorant. I suppose it's for the best, but I'm sorry sometimes that my eyes have been opened."

Mrs. Bisbee sighed again at her vehemence, and then quite unexpectedly piped up in a thin tremulous voice, with one of the songs of her youth. In a high minor key and full of quavers, it was so ridiculous that they both laughed.

> "'I sat beneath a hollow tree,
> The blast it hollow blew.
> I thought upon the hollow world,
> And all its hollow crew.
> Ambition and its hollow schemes,
> The hollow hopes we follow,
> The world and all its hollow dreams—
> All hollow, hollow, hollow!'"

"That's the way it seems to you now," she said. "It's the reaction. But you mustn't let it make you pessimistic. When you get to feeling like that you'll have to do like old Abraham did, quit looking at all

the sinners in Sodom, and hunt around for the ten good men."

A whole row of Sunday-school lessons rose up in Mrs. Bisbee's mind. She had taught a class for thirty years in the vine-covered stone church whose spire she could see from her window, and Lloyd was used to her startling and unexpected application of Scripture texts.

"Or better still," she continued, "turn your back on entire Sodom, and look away to the plains where the faithful pitched their tents. The world is full of that kind of people to-day as it was then, the faithful who never join themselves to the idols of the heathen, but who tend their flocks and live good peaceful lives, and in all their journeyings, wherever they go, *raise an altar to the Lord.*

"It's the marriages that are founded on *that* rock that never fall," she added reverently, her mind skipping from the tent-dwellers of Genesis to the wise builder in the parables with the ease of long practice. "'*And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.*'"

"Sometimes just the wife's part is built on it. She's the only one that raises the altar. Sometimes the man is the one. Of course that's better than all

being on the sand, and saves many a marriage from being the wreck it would have been if they'd left God out of it altogether. There! I never did think it all out in words quite as straight and clear and convincing to myself before. But I've often had the idea come to me when I'd be sitting in church looking at old Judge Moore's white head in the front pew, and thinking of the trouble *he'd* had — the sorrow and accidents and misfortune that have beat on *his* house — and his faith standing up bigger and stronger than ever. Even his wife's death couldn't shake it."

Here she paused to lean nearer the window and nod and smile at some one driving past the house.

"It's Agnes Waring," she explained, as Lloyd looked up too late. "Or Agnes Bond, I should say. I never can remember to call her that, although she's been married over two years. Now *there's* a happy marriage if ever there was one. The good old-fashioned sort like the Judge's, for they're both of the faithful. And do you know, my dear," she continued lightly, "I shall always hold you responsible for that. It was your making such a picture out of Agnes at that Martha Washington affair that brought her out of her shell and gave John Bond a chance to discover her. Miss Sarah thinks so too.

By the way, she was here yesterday, and she told me that she has about consented to break up housekeeping and go to live with Agnes. It's so lonely for her since poor Miss Marietta died."

"Yes, I know," said Lloyd softly, thinking of the happy release that had come to Miss Marietta only the week before.

"Now, there was another case," resumed Mrs. Bisbee. "Nobody who saw her lying there in that beautiful dress that was to have been her wedding gown, and with that wonderful smile lighting up her face, could doubt what sort of a foundation she and Murray Cathright built on. That was a love that outlasted time and reached past even death into eternity itself. So don't you go to doubting that it doesn't exist any more, my dear."

Lloyd made one more call on the way home, stopping in at the Apwalls' with a magazine which Mrs. Bisbee had asked her to leave. Oddly enough the conversation turned to the same subject that she and Mrs. Bisbee had been discussing, but she went away in a very different mood from the one in which she left the first place. Old Mr. Apwall irritated her. He was in one of his sprightly facetious humours, when he delighted in making personal remarks in a teasing way.

"Well, my little lady," he began. "I hear you've had a whole string of admirers dangling in your wake this last year. Oh, you needn't deny it!" he added, shaking a finger at her in a way he considered playful. "We've heard the gossip about that young Texas fellow and that man from the North who nearly wore out his private car coming down to see you every whip-stitch and that old duck from Cincinnati that you refused. Refused them all! Oh, yes, you did, though. We heard about it. But you must remember the story of the lass who went through the forest looking for a straight stick. She kept throwing them away and throwing them away, getting harder to please at every step, until she'd gone through the whole forest, and had to pick up a crooked one at the last."

He laughed childishly at his own tale. "Look out that you don't get a crooked stick!"

Mrs. Apwall broke in sourly. "That's about all there is left lying around to choose from these days, to *my* notion. But land sakes, Alexander, quit teasing the child. You talk as if all her chances are gone by and that she's doomed to be an old maid. The happiest lot of all, *I* say, for there's no man living but has some crook in him, and most of 'em

are all crookedness." She darted a warlike glance in his direction.

Lloyd left as soon as she could get away politely, wondering how they had heard so much of her affairs. She had refused both proposals, but she didn't know that any one outside the family knew anything about it. She wondered now if she had been over particular, for the crook that Mrs. Apwall insisted was in every man was only a slight one in the case of the owner of the private car, principally a matter of little refinements of speech and appearance which one had a right to expect of a man in his position and whose lack argued to a dainty girl like Lloyd some corresponding coarseness of nature. She had seen the other man slightly intoxicated one night at a theatre party, and could never quite forget the maudlin smile with which he poured out complimentary speeches by the wholesale.

The conversation at the Apwalls' brought back two very disagreeable occasions that she did not care to remember, and she made up her mind as she walked rapidly along towards home that it would be many a day before she went back there. They always gave her a gloomy impression of life.

The roads were so muddy that she had to take to the railroad track, stepping from one cross-tie to

another to avoid the sharp cinders between. Presently she found herself walking along the rail as she and Betty used to do on the way to school, balancing themselves with outstretched arms and counting how many steps they could take without slipping off. That was the way she and Rob had taken their walk the week before. It had been too muddy to go anywhere save along the track and they had walked the cross-ties for two miles in the face of a keen March wind. It was soft and balmy to-day, fluttering her hair and skirts in a playful way wholly unlike the boisterous flapping with which it had ushered in the month. .

As she went along she peered into fence corners and up at the budding branches, happy over every sign of spring. If the roads were dry enough by the end of the week she and Rob intended to take a long tramp through Tanglewood in search of wild flowers. Anemones, harebells and spiderwort, foxgloves and dog-tooth violets, she knew them all, and the haunts where they came the earliest. She rarely gathered them, but went from one hiding-place to another for a glimpse of their shy faces, welcoming them as she would old friends. Lloyd loved the woods like an Indian, and one of the most satisfactory things about Rob's companionship was

that he enjoyed them in the same way. Often they tramped along, scarcely saying a word a mile, finding the vibrant silences of the wood better than speech, and their mutual pleasure in them sufficient. After the winter in town, which had been an unusually cold and severe one, Lloyd longed for the beginning of spring, and from the call of the first robin and the budding of the first pussy-willow, spent as much time as possible out of doors.

April came in with a week of sunny days which hurried everything into luxuriant leafage and bud. When Rob came over one warm day for his usual Sunday afternoon walk, the whole world seemed so near the verge of bursting into full bloom that the very air was aquiver with its half-whispered secrets. Faint delicious odours stole up from the moist earth and the green growing things that crowded up out of it. Even the old locusts, conscious of a hidden wealth of sweetness which was soon to make a glory of their gnarled branches, nodded in sympathy with all that was young and riotous.

There were so many things to discover near at hand that Lloyd and Rob sauntered about the place first, before starting farther afield. There were spring beauties covering the little knolls in the

pasture, like a fall of rosy snow. There were violets down by the ice-house, and early columbines starting out from the crevices of the rockery, holding up slender stems, whereon by and bye their airy blossoms would poise like a flock of light-winged butterflies. Lloyd, happy over every tiny frond she found unfolding itself in the fern bed, and every yellow dandelion that added its mite of gold to the young year's coffers, was so absorbed in her quest that she did not notice any difference in Rob's manner.

He walked along beside her, saying little, but with the same air of repressed eagerness that the whole April day seemed to share, as if like the locusts, he too was conscious of some inner wealth of bloom, some secret happiness whose time for sharing with the spring had not yet come. Once when he answered her enthusiastic discovery of a snowdrop with only an absent-minded monosyllable, she glanced up at him curiously. There was such a light in his eyes and such an unwonted tenderness in his expression that she wondered what he could be thinking about.

Across the pasture they went, down through the orchard where the peach-trees were turning pink and the clusters of tiny white plum buds were al-

ready calling the bees, and around again to the beech-grove at the back of the house. It was a sweet flower-starred way, and Lloyd, bubbling over with the spirit of the hour, began to hum a happy little tune. Suddenly she stopped short in the path, turning her head slightly with the alert motion of a young fawn.

"What is it that smells so delicious?" she demanded. "It's almost heavenly, it's so sweet." Then after another long indrawn breath, "I'd think it was lilies-of-the-valley if it were any place but out heah on the edge of the wood-lot. They *couldn't* be way out heah. It must be some rare kind of wild flowah we've nevah discovered."

Leaving the path, they both began searching through the underbrush, pushing aside the dead leaves, and stooping now and then to examine some plant that did not seem entirely familiar.

"I'm positive it's a *white* flowah," declared Lloyd, closing her eyes and drawing in another breath of the faint, elusive fragrance. "Only a white flowah could have such an ethereal odah. It makes you think of white things, doesn't it? Snow crystals and angel wings! Oh, they *are* lilies-of-the-valley!" she cried the next instant, stooping

over a bed of green from which Rob was raking the dead leaves with a stick.

"And don't you remembah now," she cried, her eyes like eager stars as she recalled the incident, "*we* planted them heah ourselves, yeahs ago. I remembah digging up a whole apronful of some thrifty green things out of the flowah bed undah yoah mothah's window and lugging them ovah home all the way from Oaklea. You planted them in this place for me, because we thought we'd build a playhouse heah, but aftahwards we changed our minds and built it by the grape-vine swing."

"It seems to me I do have a faint recollection of something of that sort," Rob answered. "I know I had a row with Unc' Andy once for digging up some of his pet borders and transplanting them over here, but I didn't know they were lilies."

"I suppose we didn't know because we nevah happened to wandah this way aftahward when they were in bloom," she continued, seating herself beside them and parting the thickest sheaths of green to reveal the perfect white flowers hidden away among them. Throwing aside her hat, she bent over to thrust her face into their midst, revelling in the purity and exquisite fragrance.

"There's nothing like them!" she exclaimed, so

intent on the beauty of the tiny white bells that she did not see the expression with which Rob was looking down on her. There was a likeness between the two, he was thinking, the white-gowned girl and the white, white blossoms. They seemed spiritually akin. She touched one of the racemes softly.

"It's a miracle, isn't it!" she said in a low, reverent tone.

"A miracle that anything so sweet and white and perfect can suddenly come into being like this. It must have made those old lily bulbs wondah at themselves the first time they unfolded and woke up to find that such a heavenly thing had happened to them, — their hearts filled with this unearthly beauty and sweetness. Don't you suppose it made the whole world seem different, that they're not yet done wondering ovah the surprise and joy of it?"

She said it with a shy side-glance as if half-afraid he would laugh at such a childish fancy. Then she looked up startled, at the unexpected intensity of his answer.

"I *know* it made the whole world different," he said in such a strange exultant voice that she hardly knew it for Rob's. Dropping to one knee beside her

he singled out one of the lilies just beginning to burst from its sheath, and folded it close shut again in its green leaves.

"Look!" he said in the same exultant voice. "That's the way I've been for years, with something hidden away in my heart, unrecognized at first, then its sweetness only half-guessed at. And I kept it hid, and I thought never to tell you. But this morning in church it happened to *me,* this miracle of blossoming. I was sitting looking at you as I've done a thousand times before, and all of a sudden it came over me, just as sweet and unexpected as the bursting of these lilies, the knowledge that life is dear and the world beautiful because *you* are in it. I think I've always held the thought of you in my heart, Lloyd, but it has come to such full flower now, dear, I couldn't hide it from you long, even if I tried. It seems to me now that all of my life must have been a gradual growing up for this one thing — to love you!"

Then his face, glowing with an eager gladness that almost transfigured it, paled a little before the mute misery in hers.

"Oh, Rob!" she stammered, finding it hard to believe that she had heard aright. "*Don't* tell me

that! I've always loved you deahly, but not *that* way." Then as she saw all the light fade out of his eyes and his face settle into grim stern lines, she reached out both hands crying, "Oh, you deah old Bobby! I wouldn't have had it happen for the world! I can't *beah* to hurt you this way!"

Her eyes filled and two big tears splashed down on the hands she had thrust impulsively into his. With a gentleness that stirred her even more than his words had done, he bent and touched them with his lips.

"Never mind, dear," he said with a great tenderness that brought a sob up into her throat. "Don't think of it any more if it makes you unhappy. If you could have loved me it would have been heaven, but as you can't we won't talk about it any more. And — I still have my miracle. Nothing can change that."

She could not answer, the tears came crowding so fast, and as they walked back towards the house together all the brightness seemed to have dropped out of the April day. The sweetness of the lilies still followed them, however, and when she glanced around, wondering why, she saw that Rob still held the one he had knelt to pick for her. He twirled it

absently in his fingers, but as they parted at the steps he held it out to her with a smile so tender and full of understanding, that another sob came up in her throat and she took it without a word.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ROYAL MANTLE

THE week that followed was an unhappy one for Lloyd. Everywhere she went it seemed to her that lilies-of-the-valley were thrust into her face. On the way to town people got on the car at nearly every station with great bunches of them that they were carrying to offices or to their friends. The florists' windows were full of them. Men passed her on the street wearing them on their coats, and even the little shop-girl, who waited on her at the ribbon counter, had them stuck in her belt. When she called at Mrs. Bisbee's there was a box of them growing on her window-sill, and at home the whole house was permeated by the fragrance that floated out from the great crystal bowl on the library table. She could not get away from them, and they kept Rob constantly in her thoughts.

She told herself that she had never known anything quite so considerate and sweet as the way

he had taken her answer. The more she thought of his quick putting aside of self in order that she might not be unhappy, the more it grieved her that he must be disappointed. She did not see him again until the following Sunday. He came into church behind the old Judge and Mrs. Moore, and Lloyd dropped her eyes to her hymn-book, her heart in such a flutter that it sent a queer little tingle all over her. She was afraid to meet his glance, for fear the consciousness of their last meeting would send the telltale red to her face.

In the pew just behind the Moores' sat Katie Mallard with a girl from Frankfort, who was visiting her, and as Rob took his seat Lloyd saw the guest's pretty eyes fixed inquiringly on him. Then she whispered something to Katie behind her fan. Instantly the wonder crossed Lloyd's mind what the newcomer thought of him, and then she wondered how he would appear to her if she could see him with the eyes of a stranger, without the intimate knowledge their long acquaintance had given her.

She stole a glance in his direction, as the organist pulled out the stops and struck the opening chords of the voluntary. He was certainly good to look at, and, she concluded, the veriest stranger,

if he were any judge at all of such things, must see at a glance that his was a strong character, that he would scorn to do a dishonourable thing and that the years behind him were clean and honest. Then with a start she realized that she had been holding him up to her silver yardstick, and that he not only met its three requirements, but went far beyond. He had family, social position, everything that her father had desired for her save wealth, and she remembered how earnestly he had added, on that solemn watch-night, "but all these are nothing when weighed in the balance with the love of an honest man."

This greatest of all had been given her, but she could not accept because — well, she didn't know why — but probably because it was just *Bobby* who had offered it, and she couldn't think of *him* as being the one the stars had destined for her — a boy that she had made mud pies with. The old Hildegarde story had been good for her in many ways, but it had made the prince of her dreams a vague personality unlike any man she had ever met. She had never put into words, even to herself, what she expected him to be like, but the shadowy image that her imagination sometimes held up had no flaw like ordinary mortals, no human

faults and failings. And she would know him when he came, in some strange, mysterious way that needed no speech — his coming would be heralded like Hebe's: *"Before her ran an influence sweet, that bowed my heart like barley bending."*

The congregation rose for the Gloria and her eyes met Rob's. For one instant in the quick lighting of his face she had a revelation of all that his "miracle of blossoming" meant to him, then he flashed her a reassuring smile that seemed to say: "Never mind, old chum. We'll go on just as we've always done."

That she had interpreted it aright Lloyd knew when he came that afternoon as usual and proposed a walk over past the Lindsey Cabin. He seemed to have put himself into her place so fully that he understood just how she felt towards him; knew that it hurt her to have to withhold the one great thing he desired, and that his friendship was still as dear to her as ever. So with a fine consideration that she was quick to appreciate, he came back to his old place so naturally, and as such a matter of course, that it put her at her ease with him and made it possible for her to ignore the episode of the lilies as if it had never been.

May came with its locust blossoms and the birth-

day anniversary that made her "old and twenty." One of her gifts was a beautiful saddle-horse, and she began her daily rides again. Several times when Rob could arrange to leave town earlier than usual he rode with her.

Early in June Betty wrote that she was going up into the pine woods of Maine for her vacation. She had been offered a position to teach an hour a day in a sort of summer school, a girls' camp, and the position had too many advantages to refuse. She would be back in time for a week or ten days at The Locusts before the opening of the fall term at Warwick Hall. Lloyd, who had looked forward to Betty's companionship for the entire summer, was sorely disappointed. The same day that that letter came, Rob told her that he was going away for awhile. Some investments his father had made years ago had turned out to be worth investigating, and he was sure he could dispose of them advantageously. At any rate he was going to Birmingham to try. He might be back in a week or two, and he might be away the entire month of June. If Betty had been at home probably Lloyd would not have missed him at all, but because she had to take so many of her walks and rides alone, he was often in her thoughts.

"I can't expect to have every summah as gay as last one was," she said to herself one morning, as she busied herself about her room, changing the arrangement of the pictures. She leaned over to dust the ones above her low bookcase. They ran in a long panel, just above it, the series of garden fancies that Leland Harcourt had suggested. It was on a June morning like this almost a year ago that she had posed for some of them in Doctor Shelby's old garden. It seemed at least four times as long as that. She had grown so much older and wiser. She stooped to look again at the picture of Darby and Joan, under which was written, "Hand in hand while our hair is gray." As she passed her duster lightly over the glass which covered the two dear old faces, she remembered that next week this devoted couple were to celebrate their golden wedding, and that she had promised to let them "borrow" her for a whole week before, to help with the preparations.

An hour later she was opening the gate that led to the old-fashioned door where the ugly little Chinese idol still kept guard and held it open. She found Mrs. Shelby out on her cool upper piazza, behind the moon-vines, in a low sewing chair. She was stitching daintily away on a bit of fine linen.

"A wristband for one of Richard's shirts," she explained, after her first moments of delighted greeting. "And I'll go right on with it, for I'm making him a set all by hand for my anniversary present to him. He's always been so proud of my needlework and had so much sentiment for the things I've made myself. I can't begin to tell you how glad I am to have you here. I've been sitting here all morning thinking that if my little Alicia had lived what an interest she would have taken in all my preparations. I keep forgetting that she wouldn't be a young girl like you. It's Alicia's granddaughter who would have been your age."

It took only a question or two to open the gates into this gentle old soul's happy yesterdays, and Lloyd listened and questioned, enjoying the quiet romance that she gathered bit by bit as one gathers the posies of an old garden and clasps them into a full-rounded nosegay.

"Aunt Alicia," she asked presently, "were you *suah* at the time that you were making no mistake? Didn't you have any doubts or misgivings about the doctah's being the right one?"

Mrs. Shelby laughed. "I must confess that I was a very silly girl who had read so many sentimental stories that my head was full of dreams of

some faultless being who should appear like the prince to the Sleeping Beauty and change the whole world for me with a kiss. It was a long time before I could recognize him in the disguise of a poor country doctor. But I think we are apt to be that way about most things in life, my dear. Familiarity disguises the real worth of most of our blessings. We don't appreciate them till we are forced to miss them for awhile."

"But what finally showed you?" persisted Lloyd. "What made you see through the disguise?"

"Oh, my dear," laughed Mrs. Shelby again. "I couldn't explain a thing like that! How do these moon-flowers know what calls them to open, or the tide when it is time to rise? They *feel* it, I suppose. They just *know!* That is the way it was with me."

Lloyd came again next day prepared to spend the week. It would be hard to tell who enjoyed the visit the most. Gentle Aunt Alicia fluttered around, hugging the sweet pretence to her heart that for this little space at least she had a real own daughter beside her, hers to call upon for any service that the little Alicia would have gladly tendered. The old doctor spent every moment he could spare from his office in the spacious screened porch leading

from the kitchen, where all the preparations were carried gaily forward.

Here, after the invitations were sent, Lloyd spent her time. Under her supervision the old satin wedding gown was brought out and aired and pressed and slightly altered. Its white folds had turned to a mellow ivory in the years it had been laid away, just as the sentiment which cherished it had grown deeper and richer with time. Once as Lloyd intercepted a glance the old doctor exchanged with his wife as they brought out these reminders of their far-away bridal, it made her feel that she was touching with intimate fingers the heart of a sweet and tender old romance.

From the yellowed pages of an old diary, she read a description of the original wedding feast, and with an enthusiasm which went ahead of Mrs. Shelby's own prepared to copy it in every detail for the golden wedding. Jellies and cakes and salads, candied rose-leaves and rare spiced confections that had graced the first were all reproduced for this great occasion. Lloyd beat eggs and shelled nuts and stirred icing with a zest, while she planned the decorations and gave orders right and left to a household who joyed to do her bidding.

It was not until next to the last great day that

Mrs. Shelby made the discovery they had overlooked a certain gold-cake, whose recipe was missing. "And I don't suppose it's to be found anywhere in the Valley," she mourned, "unless they've kept Phronie Moore's old cook-book. She was one of my bridesmaids, and she made it with her own hands. It was one of her own special recipes that she was noted for, and I wouldn't have lost it for anything."

"You know the Judge must have kept it, Alicia," the old doctor gently insisted. "You know the slightest thing she ever handled was sacred to him, and it stands to reason that anything she'd taken so much pride in, and written every page with her own hands, as you say, would be preserved. No doubt his daughter-in-law can find it for you without the least trouble."

"Even if she could I wouldn't want to borrow it," began Mrs. Shelby, but Lloyd interrupted briskly. "I'll fix it all right for you, Aunt Alicia. I'll run right ovah to Oaklea as soon as Daphne gets this in the oven, and ask Mrs. Moore to let me copy the recipe for you."

So that is how it came about that late that afternoon, Lloyd opened the great iron gate at Oaklea, and, following the familiar path under the giant

oaks, reached the house to which she had long been a stranger.

Rob's dog, a fine Gordon setter, came out with a boisterous barking, but seeing who it was, leaped up, licking her hands and wagging a friendly welcome. It seemed as if Rob ought to be somewhere near. Everything about the place suggested him. A familiar wide-brimmed gray hat lay on the hall table, his riding-whip beside it. Up-stairs whither the coloured maid led her, there were other reminders of him: Indian clubs and a tennis racquet in a corner of the hall, and a cabinet holding the various collections that had been his fads from time to time.

"Come in here, dear," called Mrs. Moore from the depths of a sleepy hollow chair. "I'm too tired to move, so I knew you'd excuse my sending down for you to come up-stairs."

It was Rob's room into which she was ushered. Mrs. Moore held out both cordial hands without rising, and drew her down for a kiss.

"Rob's coming home to-night," she explained, "so of course everything had to be swept and garnished for so grand an occasion, and I've nearly used myself up making things fine in his honour."

Her eyes filled with tears. "It's the first time

he's been away since the dear 'Daddy' left us, and I had no idea four weeks could be such an age. I'm so excited and happy over his coming that I can scarcely talk about it calmly. But you know what a dear good son my 'Robin Adair' is to me, so you can make allowances for a fond mother's foolishness."

It was some moments before Lloyd had an opportunity to make known her errand, apologizing profusely for putting her to any exertion when she was so tired.

"Oh, it's no trouble," answered Mrs. Moore. "I think I know right where to put my hand on the book in father's room. I'll step across the hall and see."

Left to herself Lloyd gave a shy glance around the room, remembering the time when it had been a familiar playground, but now she had an embarrassed sense of intruding. Many an hour she had spent romping in it while Mom Beck and Dinah gossiped by the fire. They had had their menagerie and lions' den in that curtained alcove. Here on the hard-wood floor between the chimney-corner and the window they had chalked the ring for their marble games. She leaned over and examined the floor at her feet with a smile. Those were undoubt-

edly the dents that their top-spinning had left. Mom Beck had told them at the time, no amount of polishing could ever wipe out such holes.

The little tin soldiers that used to stand guard on the window-sill had given place to other things now. The rocking-horse that had carried them such long journeys of adventure together had been stabled for years in the attic at The Locusts. College trophies and pennants hung on the walls. A rifle and a shotgun stood in the corner where a wooden gun and a toy sword used to stay. The low table and the picture books had given place to a massive desk and rows on rows of heavy volumes bound in leather.

Then she recognized several things belonging to a later period. There was the shaving-paper case she made him the day he bought his first razor. She had been so proud of the monogram she burnt into the leather. It looked decidedly amateurish to her now. On the leather couch among its many cushions was the pillow she had embroidered in his fraternity colours and sent to him while he was at college.

Between the front windows where the desk stood, and just above it, ran four long rows of photographs set in narrow panels. Most of them were

group pictures, the first dating back to the time of her first house-party, and ending with some that had been taken the week of Eugenia's wedding. It was like a serial story of all their good times, and hastily changing her seat she leaned her elbows on the desk for another look. But the nearer view revealed something that she had not seen at the first glance. *She* was the central figure of every group. It was *her* face that one noticed first, laughing back from every picture.

Abashed at her discovery, she scuttled back to her former seat, but not before her quick glance had showed her another photograph on the desk, in a silver frame. It was the last one Miss Marks had taken of her, in her commencement gown. She did not know that Rob had one of them. She had not given it to him.

Mrs. Moore called out something to her from across the hall, and as she turned to reply she faced still another picture of herself, this one in an old-fashioned silver locket swinging from the side of the mirror. It was the Princess Winsome with the dove. She was afraid to look any further. She felt like an eavesdropper, for the very walls were calling out to her those words of Rob's that she had been trying for weeks to forget: "All my life seems

to have been a growing up for this one thing — to love you!"

She sprang up with the impulse to leave the room, to get away from these telltale voices that she had no right to listen to. But just then Mrs. Moore came back with the book.

"You can copy it here at the desk," she said, laying out a sheet of paper and Rob's big heavy-handled pen. She did not sit down while Lloyd wrote the few lines, but stood with her hand on the back of the chair till she had finished. Then she said with an amused smile, "I want to show you something funny, Lloyd. I came across it this morning while I was looking over some old things of Rob's. It's your first piece of needlework. You made it over here one rainy day under Mom Beck's instructions. It's so long ago I suppose you've forgotten, but I remember that Rob tried to make one too, and stuck his fingers so often that he cried and gave it up, and you gave him yours to comfort him."

Opening a box which she brought from some drawer, she took out a sorry little pin-cushion. All puckered and drawn, its long straggling stitches scarcely kept in place the cotton with which it was stuffed. The faded blue silk was streaked and dirty as if it had been used for a foot-ball at some stage

of its existence, and the pins that formed the crooked letter L had rusted in their places. But that it was accounted something precious, one could see from the way in which it was tied and wrapped and carefully put away in this box by itself.

It was a relief to Lloyd to find that Mrs. Moore did not attach any significance to the fact that Rob thus treasured her old gift. She only laughed and said he was like her in that regard. She couldn't bear to throw away anything connected with his childhood. Only that morning she had come across the little blue shoes that he had learned to walk in, and nearly cried over them, they recalled so plainly those happy days.

"We are both full of sentiment for old things," she continued. "I believe it will hurt him nearly as much as me if we decide to leave Oaklea and try to make a home somewhere else."

"Leave Oaklea!" repeated Lloyd wonderingly.

"Yes, Rob has had such a splendid opening offered him in Birmingham that he has been strongly tempted to move there. Oh, I haven't told you the good news, have I! He succeeded in selling that property to a big corporation that needed it to extend their manufactories, and was able to get such a fine figure for it that now he can give up that

horrid grind in the hardware business and go away in the fall for the last year of his law course. He has studied so hard with his grandfather that this one year is all that is necessary, and he will be the youngest lawyer to be admitted to the Louisville bar when he gets through. His grandfather is prouder of that possibility than anything else connected with the boy."

"But about your going away," began Lloyd, anxiously, when she had expressed proper interest in the news. "Oaklea won't be the same place with strangahs living heah. I can't imagine such a thing."

"It isn't settled yet," Mrs. Moore answered cheerfully, and then rambled on to some other topic. But Lloyd heard no word of what she was saying. A sudden panic had seized her at the possibility of Rob's being taken out of her life for ever. The bare thought gave her a sinking of the heart and a sense of desolation such as a little child might have at being left alone in the dark. As she sat there trying to imagine how it would seem never to see him again, such a revelation of her own self came to her that it sent the colour surging up in her face and set her heart to fluttering like a startled bird. She knew now for whom she had been weaving all

these years. This moment of self insight had torn away the disguise. *Her Prince had come into his kingdom!*

A pause in Mrs. Moore's remarks brought the embarrassing knowledge that she had not heard the question whose reply was being waited for, and she started to stammer some incoherent excuse, when a shrill whistle from below made them both start. The familiar sound was followed by a joyous barking from the Gordon setter, and then Rob's voice called gaily, "Where are you, mother? Six whole hours ahead of time, just to surprise you!"

Mrs. Moore sprang up, all her weariness forgotten, and ran down-stairs to meet him. Lloyd stood hesitating in the middle of the floor. She didn't want to intrude on this meeting, yet she couldn't stay there in his room, the room that babbled his secrets and reflected him on every side like a mirror. Still hesitating, then going forward and halting again, she reached the landing midway on the stairs and saw him standing with his arm around his mother, who had forgotten everything else save the joy of his return.

Then he glanced up and saw her standing there, one hand on the polished rail, and her white dress trailing down the steps behind her. And the late

afternoon sunshine stealing through the amber medallion window above her rested with such soft touch on her fair hair that it seemed that a halo of dim gold surrounded her. For an instant he thought he must be dreaming, and stood gazing at her with a look of happy wonder as if this were only another vision of the dream-saint always enshrined in his heart.

But his next glance showed him that it was Lloyd in reality, for at his adoring gaze she went all rosy red, and looked away in shy confusion. Stopping only for the briefest greeting, she hurried past him, saying that Aunt Alicia was waiting, and the wonderful cake wouldn't be done in time, that his mother would tell him about it, and she'd see him at the wedding to-morrow.

What happened afterward was all a sort of golden haze to Lloyd. The afternoon of the anniversary came and went. She greeted the guests who came in a constant stream with their gifts and good wishes. She sang the old songs when they asked her to, she saw that every one was served to the sumptuous refreshments in the dining-room; she played her rôle of daughter of the house to such perfection that Aunt Alicia caught her hand gratefully every time she passed, and followed her

with loving eyes as she flitted from room to room. She carried away the impression that it was all a beautiful sacred occasion, for the whole Valley bared its heart for that little space to show its love for the good doctor who for half a century had been its standby in its times of stress and anxiety and bitter bereavement.

Yet the only moment that stood out quite clearly was the one when Rob passed down the receiving line and stopped for a word about the perfect June day, and how sweet the white-haired bride of fifty years looked in her old-time satin gown and white roses. Lloyd had answered gaily, fluttering her fan and adjusting the slender bracelet on her arm, in a careless way, but she had not looked up at him in her usual straightforward fashion.

The festivities were not extended into the evening. Because Aunt Alicia was not strong the invitations were only for the afternoon, and by sundown the last guest had departed. Even Lloyd went, saying merrily that she left them to begin their second honeymoon, but that she would be back next morning to help put things in order.

There was company at The Locusts that night, some business acquaintances of Mr. Sherman's whom he had invited to dinner, and who were in-

terested in nothing but statistics about the South and other like stupid things. Tired by the day's exhausting demands, Lloyd left them when they went into the drawing-room, and stepping out on the porch sat down on the steps. The moon was coming up, turning the locusts to silver.

Presently she heard the sound of hoof-beats down the pike, and as she listened a solitary horseman turned in at the gate. She was not expecting Rob, but even at that distance she recognized the familiar slouch of his broad-brimmed hat and the erect way he sat in the saddle. And she knew before a word was spoken, the moment he dismounted and stood before her that he had not come for a call, only to bring some message. But he did not deliver it at once, only asked who the guests were, and sat down beside her on the steps and talked about the trivial happenings of the afternoon.

Then a few minutes later she was walking along beside him under the locusts. The moonlight lay in silver patches among the black shadows and the air was heavy with the breath of roses. They stopped at the old measuring tree, and Rob dropped the light tone in which he had been jesting, and his face grew tense in his deep earnestness.

"It's no use trying any longer, Lloyd," he said

abruptly. "I can't give you up. The golden wedding to-day was too much for me." He took a step nearer. "Dear, isn't there *anything* I could do to make myself worthier in your sight? In the old days knights could go out and *prove* their valour and fealty. Couldn't you give me some such chance? Set me a task? I'd go to the world's end to do it!"

Lloyd did not answer for a moment. Leaning against the trunk of the gnarled locust, she stood idly tracing the outline of the four-leaf clover that he had cut beside the date the last time they measured there. Then she said in a low tone:

"Yes, you can bring me the diamond leaf that we've talked about so often. By that token you'd prove that you were not only a true knight, but that all these yeahs you've been my prince in disguise."

He smiled ruefully, thinking she had purposely set him a hopeless task. They had read the legend together, and he knew full well that Abdallah found the diamond leaf of happiness only in Paradise, but he took out his watch and opened the back of the case, saying hopefully, "My lucky charm has never failed me yet, how long will you give me to find it?"

She held out her hand for the little talisman, the four-leaf clover she had given him so many years ago, but as he picked it up, the dry leaves crumbled to dust at his touch, and only one fell unbroken into her outstretched palm.

"My good omen has failed me when I needed it most!" he said bitterly, but Lloyd answered shyly, "No, don't you see? This is the *fo'th* leaf. You have brought me what I asked for."

For an instant he stood there, an incredulous joy dawning in his face, then grasping the little hand that closed over the clover, he asked wonderingly, "And my unworthy shoulders really fit your royal mantle *now,* dear? You are sure?"

She looked up at him then, not a doubt in her trusting face as she slowly made answer, "Yes, Rob, 'as the falcon's feathahs fit the falcon!'"

And then the old locusts, looking down on the ending of a story that they had watched from its beginning, stopped their swaying for a space, with a soft "Sh!" each to each as one lays finger on lip in holy places.

CHAPTER XV

"AS IT WAS WRITTEN IN THE STARS" AND BETTY'S DIARY

"THE lights are out and gone are all the guests." It is very late, but I must sit up and write the full account of it while it is all fresh and clear in my mind. Besides I am too wide awake to sleep even if I should try. It was a beautiful, beautiful wedding; but I must go back ever so far if I am to have no gaps in this record.

It is three years now since I went away to Warwick Hall to teach; full, hard years, but so rich in experiences and so helpful in my work that I'd gladly go on with them if I were not needed here at home. But they do need me now that Lloyd is married and gone, and although she has not gone far and will be in and out every day, and her room is just as she left it, and her place will always be hers, still I am the daughter of the house in many ways, and can in a measure make up to godmother

and Papa Jack all they have done for me. I think they do feel repaid to a great extent by my little successes and the prospect of more to follow by and by. It made me so glad and proud when I heard Papa Jack telling the doctor to-day about the essays the *Atlantic* had accepted of mine, and how pleased he was over the series of sketches that the New York publishers are going to bring out in book form in time for the holidays. The same publishers that refused my poor old novel too.

It does not seem possible that two years and a half have gone by since Lloyd wrote to me of her engagement, but it seemed a long time to look forward to then. Her father and mother would not have consented to give her up any sooner even if Rob had been in a position to ask it. Now he has been a member of his grandfather's firm for a full year, and everybody says he is one of the most promising young lawyers ever admitted to the Louisville bar. He has gone into his life work as he went into all his games — to win! And he is so big and strong and *dependable,* I know that godmother and Papa Jack feel perfectly safe in giving Lloyd up to him. I think that even the old Colonel finds it a little easier to be reconciled to the idea of her leaving because he is so fond and proud of

Rob. But he seems to take it to heart more than any one else.

Lloyd thought he did, too, and when she first began to plan her wedding she asked her father if he would feel hurt if she asked her grandfather instead of him to go with her to the altar and give her away. "You know, Papa Jack," she said in that saucy way of hers that no one about the place can resist, "you cut him off from the one chance he should have had to perform that ceremony, by running away with mothah. So it's only fair you should make it up to him now by giving him the honah of escorting me. Besides you and she have each othah, and he feels so left out and lonely and is making such a deadly serious affair of my going away."

Papa Jack saw it from her point of view and was entirely willing to do as she wished. When the old Colonel found out what Lloyd wanted, he was so touched and pleased and complimented that I think he must have lain awake nights trying to think of things to show his appreciation. This last week she called presentation week, because every single day he surprised her with some lovely present.

The first day he gave her the little silver sugar-bowl with butterfly handles and the cream-pitcher shaped like a lily that he had promised her the first

time she had a "pink party" up in his room, when she was a tiny little girl. The next day it was a purse full of bright new gold pieces, and the next a locket that had been his mother's, all set round with sapphires, and with sapphires strung at intervals on the slender chain that held it. One day the gift was a treasure of a rosewood chair and writing-desk that had belonged to Lloyd's grandmother Amanthis, with all the little mother-of-pearl articles that go with a desk, just as she had used them. She was too surprised for anything the day he gave her the harp. It had been called hers since she started to learn to play on it, but she never for a moment supposed he would allow it taken away from The Locusts. The sixth present had no intrinsic value, but he had treasured it for years, a medal bestowed on one of his Virginia ancestors by the king, as a reward for his services to the crown in those early days of struggle and stress in the colonies.

Then last and best of all in Lloyd's eyes was a splendid copy of the beautiful portrait of her grandmother Amanthis. I cannot distinguish it from the original that has always hung over the mantel in the drawing-room. The Colonel had a fine artist come on from New York to paint it, while Lloyd was at the seashore this summer.

She was so happy over it and all her heirlooms. She said she didn't want her father and mother to give her any new silver. They had talked about a full set. She said there was so much old family plate over at Oaklea, which she would far rather use. So godmother gave her a chest of linen, and Papa Jack some shares in the Arizona mines. She has actually seemed to take pleasure in the thought that she is marrying a poor man, and has been preparing for it all during her engagement by keeping her expenses within a certain limit instead of spending in the lavish way she has always been accustomed to. She's taken such pride too in learning all the housewifely arts that her grandmother and the Judge's wife were so noted for.

Eugenia and Stuart Tremont came several days ago, and Joyce came with them to be one of the bridesmaids. Phil could not leave his work just now long enough to come, but he sent the dearest little gift — a cut-glass honey dish and cover, with a honey spoon to go with it. The spoon is a flat gold one with a cluster of bees on the handle. The note he sent with it was dear, too, thanking her so beautifully for the inspiration and help her friendship had been to him, and for her good advice that sent him to "The School of the Bees."

Lloyd was so pleased that she hunted up a little unset turquoise he had once given her as a friendship stone, and Rob took it to town and had a jeweller set it into a tiny stick-pin for her, and she wore it as the " something blue " at her wedding.

Rob couldn't afford to give her an expensive present like the diamond pendant that Raleigh Claiborne gave Allison when they were married last summer, but it pleased Lloyd more than a queen's tiara could have done. It was just a little clasp to fasten her bridal veil. He had it made to order — only a four-leaf clover, but the fourth leaf was diamond-set, because, like the one Abdallah found in Paradise, it was the leaf of happiness.

It was just a quiet church wedding, as simple as it could possibly be made, in the late afternoon of one of the sweetest, goldenest October days that ever shone on the Valley. Only her most intimate friends were invited to the ceremony, because the little stone church is so small, but the doors were thrown open to everybody at the reception that followed at The Locusts.

Since the church has been frescoed inside and done over in soft cool greens, it makes me think of the heart of a deep beech woods. The light slips in through its narrow deep-set windows just as it

does between the trees in the dim forest aisles. Lloyd wouldn't have it filled with hothouse roses. She said nothing could be as appropriate as the wild flowers growing all around it in the country lanes and meadows. So there was nothing but tall plumes of goldenrod nodding in every open window, while the altar was a bank of snowy asters. She wanted them she said because aster means star, and it was at the altar her happiness would be written for her in the stars.

She said, too, that as long as it was in the country and she needn't think of the conventions and could have things just as she pleased, she wanted it to be a white wedding — everybody in the bridal party to wear white. She said the old Colonel wouldn't look natural to her in anything else that time of year, and all the others would appear to better advantage. Every one said afterward what a beautiful picture it made. Rob and Malcolm and Keith and Ranald and Alex are all handsome young fellows anyhow, and they looked bigger and handsomer than ever in their immaculate white suits. Malcolm was best man and I was maid of honour. Kitty and Joyce and Katie Mallard were the bridesmaids. We girls carried armfuls of the starry asters and the men wore them as boutonnières.

"'SHE LOOKED TO ME JUST LIKE ONE OF HER OWN LILIES.'"

As for Lloyd, when she came out of her room, her dress trailing behind her like a soft, pure-white cloud, so light and airy it seemed as if it must have been woven on some fairy loom, and with a great cluster of lilies-of-the-valley in her hands, she looked to me just like one of her own lilies. Poor old Mom Beck, who had dressed her, stood behind her with the tears streaming down her black face, saying, "Honey, you sho'ly nevah will look moah like a blessed angel when you git through the pearly gates than you do this minute!"

From the look on Rob's face as he met her at the white starry-crowned altar, I am sure he felt that he had already gone through "the pearly gates." It was all so sweet and solemn, and as we listened to the words, "*Whom God hath joined together*," I think we all felt that heaven's own benediction rested on them, and would follow them all their way to the "Land o' the Leal."

How the people of the Valley poured in at The Locusts afterward to wish them joy! Old and young, rich and poor, white and black, for of course all the old servants of both families had to come in to pay their respects. I am sure that no more heartfelt good wishes were uttered than their "God bless you, Miss Lloyd, honey," or "I wish you joy,

Mistah Rob," as the faithful black hands that had served them from babyhood grasped theirs with loyal good-will. They seem to count this year that joins the two old families and estates as a sort of year of jubilee.

It isn't often that a wedding has everybody's approval as this one has. Lloyd has always been as much of a favourite at Oaklea as Rob is at The Locusts. The Judge is radiantly happy and Mrs. Moore has been as sweet and considerate about everything as if Lloyd were really her own daughter. She wants Lloyd to take the place as mistress of the house just as she did when *she* went there a bride. She and Rob's father didn't take a wedding journey, but went straight home to Oaklea to spend their honeymoon, and she was so pleased when she found that Lloyd and Rob wanted to do the same. She and the Judge waited just long enough to welcome them home to-night, and then took the train for Alabama to visit some of her people. They have long been wanting to make the trip, and so chose this time.

All the details of the supper were carried out just as they were at Eugenia's wedding, excepting the charms. Lloyd vowed she had lost faith in them since Mammy Easter's fortune had failed to come

true. By rights Joyce should have been married before either Allison or herself because she caught Eugenia's bouquet. But because the girls still believed in them she did throw her bouquet from the top of the steps just before she left, and Kitty caught it.

It is only a step over to Oaklea, so she went away in her bridal gown and veil. I'll never forget the picture she made as she stood there in the moonlight, waiting for the carriage to drive up for them, or the adoring look in Rob's eyes as he turned to lead her down the steps. Somehow it makes the tears come crowding up in such a mist I can hardly see to write.

And now I have come to the last page of this volume of my Good-times book. Dear Lloyd, dear little sister who was the beginning of all my good times, I am glad that heaven has sent you this happy day for me to chronicle! What a beautiful Road of the Loving Heart your girlhood has left in the memory of all your friends! What a spirit of joy you have been in this old home, and what an aching void you have left behind you! No matter what the years may hold in store, you will *be* a blessing wherever you go, for you have learned to keep tryst with all that life demands of you. And because you

were true to your Hildegarde promise and wove only according to the silver yardstick, I can close this record in the same words that end the old story we have both loved so long: *"So with her father's blessing light upon her, she rode away beside the prince; and ever after all her life was crowned with happiness as it had been written for her in the stars!"*

THE END.

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